Between the Shadow and the Soul

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Between the Shadow and the Soul

by raiast

Summary

When Will decides to stop taking his suppressants neither he nor Hannibal can deny the attraction between them. After nearly a decade of running from his biology, Will is faced with his primitive Omega urges full force. As if navigating his hormones wasn't enough, there is a killer at large with a very specific motive that seems to only be targeting preteen boys.

This is a very odd mix of fluffy/ABO Hannigram nonsense and Dark Will/super messed up case drama.

Notes

So. This is my first venture into ABO-Verse. In fact, I was not even introduced to this concept until Hannigram. So this has essentially become a mix of ABO rules that I've found interesting/plausible and if there is something that doesn't quite make sense or could use more fleshing out please, please let me know, because this is all very new and scary for me.

I don't want my tags to get bogged down with really depressing/morbid crap, so I will do preliminary warnings there and repeat it here: This story arc contains a case that includes a killer that kidnaps, rapes and kills preteen boys. I do not plan to write POV from the killer but there is description of physical and sexual abuse toward minors. I advise that you continue to read this at your own caution. What started out for me as some random fluffy/porn ABO Hannigram nonsense has taken a very dark turn with my desire to add an actual plot.

That said, if you do decide to continue on I hope that you enjoy. This will largely be Will POV with some Hannibal POV scenes mixed-in as well.

Chapter 1

On a Thursday evening, midway through October, at precisely 7:30 PM, Hannibal opens the door in his office that leads to his patient entrance. Normally, at this moment, Will Graham would appear to him, standing still and stoic, awaiting an invitation to enter. Tonight, Will is pacing.

Rather than the traditional, polite greeting that he would offer in response to Hannibal's, Will nods hastily and brushes past him. Rather than adjourning to his usual chair, Will opts to pace restlessly through the office.

"How are you tonight, Will?" Hannibal inquires after a moment of silence; after watching Will stalk the perimeter of the room once anxiously and then beginning a slow turn again, this time his focus drawn to this shelf, that desk. He watches, curious, as Will drags his knuckles along the bookcase for a few feet before stalking over to his desk to fidget with his pencils and scalpel.

Will gives a noncommittal grunt to the question, his shoulders raising in a half-shrug before his focus is drawn to the ladder leading to the mezzanine; he runs his hands along it tenderly. "Honestly, I feel a little stir crazy," he admits as he drifts to the opposite side of the room to the flickering fireplace. His hand pulls up to clutch at the dark mantle and then strokes along it before pulling away.

Hannibal knows what he's doing, even if Will doesn't, and it comes as a slight relief when the Omega drifts back toward the center of the room, shoving his hands deep into his pockets.

"Is there any particular reason you've felt the need to scent my entire office?" he decides to get right down to the point. Clearly whatever is exasperating Will has some root that is biological in nature.

"Any reason…" he echos softly, blinking and glancing around. When realization strikes him, his stormy eyes widen in alarm and a quite fetching shade of pink floods his cheeks as he ducks his gaze away from the Alpha before him. "Christ. I'm sorry, I didn't realize--"

"It's quite alright, Will," Hannibal chooses to have mercy on the mortified Omega, raising a placative palm as he drifts a few paces closer. "As it happens, I'm not currently seeing patients on Fridays. After the long weekend the scent should fade well enough for my appointments on Monday."

He notes with interest the way that Will seems slightly deflated at the prospect. "This is not normal behavior for you," he prompts after a moment.

Will shakes his head in agreement, his hands coming up to rub vigorously at his face. "No. Sorry. No, I've…" he sighs, lifting his gaze to Hannibal sheepishly. "I've recently gone off suppressants. It's been quite some time and I guess...I guess there were a lot of urges they were suppressing, other than my heats."

“I’ve never known you to show typical Omega behaviors,” Hannibal notes, and Will nods once more as he diverts his gaze. “You say ‘quite some time’. How long have you been on suppressants?”

“Nine years,” Will answers easily, as if the revelation dropped isn’t something to be shocked over. When a displeased whine, short as it is before he cuts it off, squeaks from Hannibal’s throat, Will nods again, blush blossoming anew. “I know. I know that doctor’s recommend no more than two years at a time. Obviously I had found a way around that, until now.”

“You can do grievous harm to yourself staying on suppressants consistently for more than two years,” Hannibal states, knows by Will’s now aggravated nod that he’s heard this statement from doctors many times before. “Have you been experiencing physical symptoms, Will?” Will meets his gaze for a moment, turns away; that’s a yes, then.

“It’s done, alright?” he snaps, albeit softly, turning into himself further in shame. He knows that he’s upset the Alpha before him and it’s obvious that he is quashing the instinctive urge to let out a plaintive whine to regain Hannibal’s favor. He may be able to control the noises his hindbrain wants to make, but Hannibal is sure Will doesn’t realize that in turning away and bowing his head he has bared his neck in submission.

Hannibal has never felt much regard for Omegas. By and large they are weak, simpering creatures, and as an attractive and successful Alpha he has had to deal with mothers and fathers throwing their Omega children at him (until the Omegas were old enough to do it on their own) for most of his life.

It surprises him, then, how enticing it is to see such displays coming from Will; especially because he hardly notices that it’s happening. Will isn’t attempting to seduce him or urge a bond; he doesn’t want to glom onto Hannibal and let the Alpha take care of him. He’s simply existing and his biological urges are manifesting naturally. It’s incredibly alluring. He’s stunned to find himself resisting the urge to purr at the sight of the man’s neck; open, bare, just waiting for a mating bite...

Will heaves a dejected sigh, running a frustrated hand through his hair and down his neck; the action stirs the air with his scent and reminds Hannibal how uniquely inviting it is: sweet, as Omegas are, but not overly so, with fresh, loamy undertones like earth after a Spring rain. He’s two paces closer before he catches himself and freezes, though not before getting close enough to detect another layer to the bouquet, unfamiliar yet unmistakable in nature: the sweet, spicy pheromones of fertile Omega. Like chocolate laced with capsaicin. Will is going to be going into heat in the near future.

A common response to going off heat suppressants, he chides himself wryly when his initial reaction is surprise. Hannibal can’t help but wonder if Will has a plan in place for this. He certainly seems the type of Omega to lock himself away for a week and stick it out alone, but this will be his first heat in nearly a decade. It will likely be far greater in intensity, possibly longer than average as well; it could be dangerous to face it alone. Unbidden, a ghost-image of Will appears in his mind, sweaty and flushed and squirming, distressed as he attempts to satisfy his baser needs synthetically, calling out for an Alpha that isn’t there--

He blinks away the thought, swallowing thickly to quell the purr that threatens to climb out of his throat. He's always been attracted to and fond of Will, but he's *never* had this type of response to his nearness.

It seems my biology finds Will an even greater match for me than I suspected, Hannibal muses. *Evoking a physical response would be more telling yet…*

"I wonder, Will, if it might be beneficial to forgo our session tonight. Why don't you join me for dinner instead? I've a roast waiting for me at home, plenty to spare." When Will glances at him with wary hesitation dancing in his stormy eyes, he gives him a reassuring smile, "I am assuming, of course, that you have not yet had dinner."

Will shakes his head at that. Hannibal thought not. It's unlikely the profiler has had little else but coffee and the protein bar he had for breakfast. Possibly whatever pitiful thing that passed for a sandwich from the cafeteria between lectures. After a moment, he returns the smile. "Alright," he agrees, nodding as he heads back to the door to retrieve his coat. "That sounds good. Just...just let me know if I start blindly scenting your stuff," he adds with a sheepish grin, that lovely pink gracing his cheeks once more.

"Certainly," Hannibal assures him.

They drive separately to Hannibal's house, and though he knows it was a spur of the moment invitation, Will still feels odd showing up empty-handed. He rubs a restless hand along the back of his neck as he raises the other to announce his arrival with a brief knock.

Should have stopped off for that bottle of wine after all, he grouses inwardly. A moment later the door opens for him, Hannibal ushering him inside warmly, lack of offering notwithstanding. He deposits Will in the dining room, citing that dinner would be ready shortly.

Will settles in, noticing and appreciating, not for the first time, that Hannibal's place setting is located across the table from his own, rather than at the head of the table where, as host and Alpha, he has every right to be. It's a consideration that always leaves Will with a swelling feeling in his chest, despite having been invited to dine with Hannibal multiple times now; one of the many reasons that Will enjoys spending time with the Alpha while he actively avoids being around others. Hannibal is refined and calm, all of the charm and strength of an Alpha with none of the lizard brain posturing bullshit. Will was relieved to discover this not long after they were introduced; he gets enough aggression from Jack.

Certainly if any other Alpha had found out he was recently off suppressants and then immediately invited him to dinner Will would have been more than skeptical of their intentions. It is common, after all, for Alphas to feel an urge to provide for an Omega, to show how capable they are. Hannibal, as it turns out, is just exceedingly polite.

Hannibal returns after a moment with a decanter of wine. The red is so dark and rich it almost looks black in the dim lighting, it's cranberry color only revealed when the glass catches the flickering light of the fireplace. Will nods at Hannibal's offer, seizing his glass for a sip as

soon as Hannibal departs back to the kitchen. The wine is thick, rich and sweet with the sharp aftertaste of berry; blackcurrants, if Will had to guess. He doesn't have the most refined palate, but it has definitely expanded under Hannibal's hospitality. He licks his lips and swallows again, finds that the wine seems to coat his mouth in a pleasant way. He wonders absently if this is an appropriate pairing for the meal or if Hannibal served it to accommodate the insatiable sweet tooth for which Omegas are known.

He's just relaxing back into his seat, coming to the realization that the anxious energy which had held him captive all day seemed to have dispelled as soon as he arrived, when Hannibal returns with their plates. He sets one before Will and his mouth is instantly flooded with saliva at the aroma. When Hannibal takes his seat he waits, instinctively, for the Alpha to take the first bite. As ever, it takes Will a moment to remember that Hannibal will always see his guests fed first, regardless of their gender. He breaks off a bite from the slice of roast on his plate, feels a pleased purr rumble unbidden through his chest when the tender meat falls apart in his mouth.

Hannibal covers his pleased smile by taking a bite of his own, but not before Will catches it. "I admit, it's not quite as elegant a fare as I usually serve," he nods down to their plate of roast, gravied potatoes and asparagus, "but I felt that something robust and comforting would be fitting for the colder days we have seen recently."

"It's delicious," Will purrs, enjoys his next bite so much that he can't even find himself embarrassed about it. He brings his gaze up to flash a small smile at the man across from him. "It's always delicious."

It's Hannibal's turn to let out a pleased purr, a sound which, in the last year of knowing him, Will has never had the privilege to hear. His hand jerks in surprise as he reaches for his wine and the liquid nearly sloshes over the edge at the abrupt movement. He keeps his gaze lowered and focuses on bringing the drink to his lips with a steady hand. He has heard an Alpha purr before; it has never made his stomach twist like that. He keeps his eyes on his plate as they eat in silence for the space of a long minute, and Will is beginning to rethink his assumption about Hannibal's innocent intentions when the Alpha decides to make conversation.

"So, Will," he always addresses Will as if there is more than one person present and he wants to be clear as to whom he is speaking. It's almost as if he repeats Will's name to prove that he remembers what it is.

Or he enjoys saying it, his traitorous brain supplies the alternative, and Will is so busy suppressing the thrill that runs down his spine at the thought that he nearly misses the rest of Hannibal's statement.

"Have you a plan in place for your heat?"

Will's eyes snap up to Hannibal, wide with shock and alarm. The question is as abrupt as it is personal; he can feel heat flooding his cheeks, doesn't think he can blame it entirely on the wine. "I, uh…" he clears his throat, takes a hearty gulp of wine, clears his throat again. "No. No, I guess I haven't...haven't really considered it yet." When Hannibal remains silent Will feels pressed to continue. "There are heat clinics, I suppose." Clinical, sterile, cold. "They

also have out-call services since the last time I…" he clears his throat again, wondering why he is even entertaining this topic; wondering why Hannibal even brought it up. "It feels so impersonal, though. I don't know if I could let a stranger into my house like that."

"And you don't strike me as having many Alpha acquaintances," Hannibal supplies, and Will fights the impolite urge to glare at him. He knows damn well that Will's social circle can be counted on one hand.

"Well I'm not about to ask Jack," he jokes, distinctly aware that he has just left a door open; he can't convince himself that he didn't do it on purpose. He's curious if that was Hannibal's intention.

"I served as a heat counselor," Hannibal strides through that door with all the devastating confidence of an Alpha, "During my residency. It has been quite some time, however…"

However.

However, I am still capable, competent. However, I could see you safe and satisfied. However, I would do it for you, if you asked it of me.

Will's head spins, and he realizes with his shuddering inhale that he's forgotten to breathe. He licks his lips, raising his eyes to glance bashfully at Hannibal from beneath his lashes. Despite the wine, despite the tender meat that liquifies on his tongue and the rich, savory gravy that accompanies it and the potatoes, Will finds his mouth impossibly dry. "What--" his throat cracks on the word and he swallows once, again, willing desperately for his mouth to generate saliva. "What exactly would that entail?"

"I would be sure to keep you fed and hydrated, and safe, of course," Will wants to bristle at the implication that he couldn't keep himself safe, though he knows that as an Omega in heat he would be all but defenseless to any Alpha that might stumble upon him. "I would satisfy your desire for a knot, when it arises. Just coming off of suppressants your first heat or two is likely to be infertile, but we would have you on contraceptives all the same--"

Will chokes on his sip of wine at that, gaping wide-eyed at the doctor across from him. "Wait--wait are you saying that *you*--"

"I don't believe in using synthetic knots, Will," Hannibal explains calmly, as though he's not just suggested with all the casualty of a chat about the weather that they should have actual *intercourse* during this scenario. "An Omega's desires during heat don't end with a physical knot. They crave the presence and pheromones of a capable, compatible Alpha. You can't receive that from a toy."

He's clearly pushing for this to be a physical arrangement, though his demeanor is neither overbearing nor salacious. Will...isn't turned off. In fact, he feels desire coil hotly in the pit of his stomach at the concept. It's not as if Hannibal isn't attractive, and they get along well enough…

"I, uh," Will skewers the last, lonely stalk of asparagus on his plate, attempting a casual timbre. "I would have to think about that."

“By all means,” Hannibal allows softly. They finish their last few bites in silence. Will drains the rest of his wine as Hannibal clears their plates. “I’m afraid I don’t have a dessert prepared, having planned on dining alone,” he sounds apologetic when he returns, as if it’s utterly unthinkable that he wouldn’t have emergency measures in place for just such an event. “Would you care for a nightcap? I was recently gifted a nice scotch--”

“I should really get back to Wolf Trap,” Will declines with equal parts relief and disappointment. “My dogs,” he tacks on by way of explanation, and though it is a perfectly legitimate and truthful excuse, it feels like an excuse all the same.

“Of course,” Hannibal nods, flashes him a warm smile, “I’ll see you out.”

Clearly his host does not feel any lingering awkwardness from the incredibly personal conversation they’ve just had. Will wonders, not for the first time, what it must be like to live with such confidence. It was the one thing, apart from the general condescension that comes with being an Omega in an Alpha’s world, that has led to Will picturing how different his life might be if biology had dealt him a different hand.

Anger flares within him suddenly, directed entirely at himself. Omega or not, he’s not some weak thing. He doesn’t need to be an Alpha to have confidence or take what he wants. He’s well aware that the only thing holding him back is himself, his own insecurities. It is aggravating when he finds himself falling into using his gender as the catalyst for his unhappiness.

So when he hauls his jacket over his shoulders and turns to face Hannibal, it’s with a renewed sense of pride and assertiveness that he raises his eyes to meet his before flickering down to the Alpha’s neck. He glances back up at Hannibal, new-found confidence wavering as he asks, “May I?” the request is barely more than a whisper.

Hannibal gives a short nod, tilts his head without hesitation to bare his neck. Twin surges of disbelief and desire rage through him at the sight of an *Alpha* baring his neck to him. Will nearly whines from the shock of it. Instead, he licks his lips and takes a step forward to close the distance between them, until their chests meet with each steady inhale. He brings his hands up to Hannibal’s broad shoulders for no other reason than to feel the strength beneath them. His breath catches in his chest as he presses closer to the Alpha, closer than he’s ever been in all the time they’ve known each other.

The heat radiates between them like an inferno. If Hannibal is at all affected by the intimacy of the moment, he does a remarkable job hiding it. Will leans in to brush his cheek along the thick column of Hannibal’s neck, pausing only when his nose is pressed to the Alpha’s scent glands just below and behind his ear. He can’t help but wish that Hannibal would hold him, but the Alpha’s arms remain stoically at his sides. He parts his jaw and takes a slow, deep breath in, until his lungs feel ready to burst.

Hannibal is cedarwood and fresh herbs--lemongrass, he thinks, and possibly thyme. There’s a musky and heady aspect that screams of virility, and buried deep beneath, something he can’t quite place; pungent but not unpleasant and slightly metallic, like iron or copper. His eyes flutter shut as the scent engulfs him, his mouth instantly flooded with saliva. He has the alarming and wholly unfamiliar urge to sink his fangs into the flesh laid out beneath them; his

teeth itch at the prospect. Without thinking, he lets his tongue dart out to steal a quick taste, and a shiver wracks his spine as the whine he had been quelling finally breaks free.

Yes, he thinks dizzily, allowing one more sniff before collecting himself and pulling back. *That is a **good** match.*

When their gazes meet again, Will is pleased to see that Hannibal's normally amber colored eyes are nearly eclipsed by his blown pupils, the telling Alpha red ring around them the only sliver of color remaining. Will is certain that he looks equally affected, can feel the burn as his irises flash Omega gold. They breathe steadily in silence for a moment, Will waiting to speak until he is certain he can piece together a proper sentence.

"Okay," he nods, wondering if he looks as flushed as he feels. "Okay," he says again, because he's suddenly not quite sure how to put his acceptance into words. "If you want to...I'd appreciate your help. How, uh...how does this work, exactly?"

Hannibal lets out a low hum. If he's pleased by Will's acceptance of his offer, as ever, he doesn't show it. "After so long without one I expect your first heat or two will be longer than average, more intense as well. I would recommend that you have your pack kenneled for the week and stay here. That way, I can assure that my kitchen is stocked properly. I've a spare room that you can use for nesting. I don't use it often, so I'm sure that airing it out for a day or so will ensure a more neutral scent."

Still slightly hazy from the blast of pheromones he'd just inhaled, Will nearly tells Hannibal that he could think of smelling far worse things other than him. *What am I, drunk??* He shakes the thought off internally, nods. "I'll let you know when I enter preheat," he informs him, allowing Hannibal to slip past to open the door for him. He pauses on the other side of the threshold.

They regard each other in silence for a moment, and it seems that both of them are reluctant to end the evening. Will opens his mouth to bid Hannibal a good night when the jarring tone of his cellphone erupts. He sighs, shooting Hannibal an apologetic look as he fishes the phone from the pocket. At this time of night the caller can only be-

"Jack," he grunts, by way of greeting.

"Will. You still in Baltimore?" The Alpha is even more abrupt than usual. That can only mean one thing. Will can't help but cringe slightly.

"I am," he glances up; Hannibal is watching him with mild interest.

"We've got another scene. Washburn Park on Willow and 2nd." A beat. "It's him."

Will's stomach sinks; the roast and potatoes that had just minutes ago felt so comforting turning to lead in his gut. "I'm on my way."

Fuck.

When Hannibal hears that he's been called to a crime scene, he offers to drive. Will accepts gladly, using the free moment to call his neighbor down the road to ask him to see to the dogs.

"It's the Lonely Heart killer?" Hannibal asks when he finishes his call.

"Don't call him that," Will snaps reflexively. "And don't give Freddie Lounds page hits by reading her shit." There's heavy silence for a moment, wherein Will considers apologizing. Instead, when he opens his mouth, he continues his tirade. "It's not even a clever name. There have been at *least* half a dozen other killers that have been referred to as such. And it implies that this killer has a similar M.O. He's not some psychopath that butchers people through the Seeking Ads."

"No," Hannibal agrees. "What he does is much worse."

"What he does is unthinkable," Will corrects softly, staring forlornly out of the window. He's already dreading the scene that awaits him. "It's unthinkable that Lounds can even stomach writing her sensationalist garbage about it."

"He *does* place a mating bite on his victims," Hannibal points out after a moment.

"There were bites on the necks of the first two," Will agrees. "We haven't determined if was meant to incite a bond. We don't know enough about his victim pool yet."

"If this one is like the others, it will be the third. Officially a pattern."

Will doesn't respond. He's well aware of the implications of this body turning up the same as the first two.

The rest of the twenty minute drive is spent in tense silence. It's not until Hannibal is pulling up to park behind the fleet of flashing cruisers that Will sighs, pausing after he releases his seat belt. "I'm sorry-"

"It's perfectly understandable, Will," Hannibal assures him, and Will risks a glance over finds his nerves settled slightly by Hannibal's calm smile. It's strange to think that less than an hour ago the air between them was charged with such a different sort of tension.

Will steels himself, leaves the warm haven of the Bentley.

"Will," Jack is on them immediately. "Dr. Lecter," he adds, his tone very obviously pleasantly surprised. "Good of you to come as well. This way," he jerks his head toward the center of the darkened park.

They weave through a sea of rubbernecker--the crowd has grown to an impressive size for this time of evening--and duck under the yellow line. Will's steps falter as they draw nearer, the BAU forensics team and photographers clearing aside when his presence is noted. At some point Jack and Hannibal halt, and then it's just him and the body.

He swallows thickly, repressing the shudder that threatens to wrack his body. It's the third one in as many months, and like the two before him the boy can't be more than ten or eleven

years old. He is thin with a slight frame, smaller than average for his age, with soft, delicate features on his lifeless face. He is nude, save for the violent black and purple bruises that are smattered along his hips and limbs. His neck shows the same--strangled, like the others--with the burning red imprint of fresh teeth marks on one side.

Will tries to breathe, finds that his lungs refuse to inflate beyond small gasps at a time. His eyes burn, and when he closes them he feels hot tears spill down his cheeks. This is the first child he's had to study like this since going off his suppressants. Apparently, as solitary and abrasive as he his, he still feels the nurturing, maternal pull of his Omega instincts. He experiences a flash of panic wherein he thinks he may actually vomit or burst into hysterics, but then he steels himself and lets the pendulum swing.

I choose my target and take him when the opportunity presents itself. I have watched him, waited. I have come to know him, but he does not know me; he hasn't yet been afforded the opportunity. I will change this. When he knows me he will love me, as I love him.

The bruises that mar pale skin fade and then disappear. The boy sits up, is dressed, is smiling, is simply existing as any child should, completely unaware of what fate is about to befall him.

He is small, slight. Beautiful, in a delicate way. In a handful of years it is quite likely he will present as an Omega. I will claim him before anyone else can. He will see, with time, that I am the one he is destined to belong to.

The ghost-image of the boy grows fearful, resistant. He fights, and that does not bode well for him.

*If he won't listen to reason, I'll just have to **show** him. I will show him how we fit together. I will force the bond, if it comes to that. After we bond he won't be able to fight any longer. He'll be mine, completely. Forever.*

And if the bond doesn't take…

Blinding rage sears through him. That little brat. That *little brat* . He did it on purpose. Refuses to bond. It's satisfying to wrap his hands around the boy's neck, so slight in his grasp that he can lace his fingers together around the back to add to the pressure, feel the trachea collapse, feel the tiny breaths seize.

If the bond doesn't take...

Will chokes out a pained whine and stumbles backward as he returns to reality. Hannibal's solid frame is behind him in an instant, steadying him until his legs stop feeling too weak to support himself. He pulls away with a nod of thanks, turning to Jack as the man approaches; he's painfully aware that the attention of every Alpha in a ten foot radius has snapped to him at the sound of his distress.

"These boys are all slight in stature, fragile. They all look like potential Omegas. Evidence of physical and sexual abuse, a bite mark where scent glands will develop..." Will sighs, rubbing

a hand across the back of his neck. “As much as I hate to admit it, Freddie Lounds is right: he’s lonely. Our killer is an Alpha, and he’s looking for a mate.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal do some digging into the final days of two of the victims. A new lead emerges.

Chapter Notes

Me: "Will be posting weekly"

Also me: Adds new chapter two days later

To be fair, I did say if my progress continued at its current rate I could post some of the earlier chapters more frequently. What can I say? Your excitement excited me.

Now that there is a definite pattern among the victims, the time has come to determine the lowest common denominator between them. All three were young boys, Omega-esque in stature, though they couldn't officially present as such for five or six more years. All three boys disappeared from Baltimore and all three bodies were dumped within the city. The killer isn't travelling far, though he must have some sort of vehicle to move the boys around inconspicuously. He must be local, must be finding these boys *somewhere*; a park, a movie theater, an arcade. There must be *some* common ground between the three…

Three boys, three separate schools. One in soccer, one in academic triathlon, one with no extracurriculars to speak of. All from different corners of the city. All went to different doctors, different after school programs, different summer camps.

"*Fuck*, c'mon!" Will hisses as he flips Trevor Walton's file shut for the fourth time. He pulls forward Jordan Mayhew's file and opens it for the third time that day, scanning over the statements gathered from his parents.

Last known whereabouts, school. Same as Trevor, who was last seen leaving soccer practice. But Andrew Phillips was supposed to be at home when he disappeared.

Will sighs, feeling heavy with the increasing suspicion that he is going to have to go interview the families himself, see the boys' rooms. There has to be *something* that the investigators missed. Something that could connect all three of the boys. The killer has to be hunting from *somewhere*. He's certainly not just driving around and grabbing whatever boy

catches his fancy. He knows these boys, distantly. He watches them before he takes them. Will is sure of it.

What's worse, the killer is escalating, his timeline accelerating. He kept his first victim for six days before disposing of him, waited just over a month before taking the second, again dumping his body on the sixth day. The third boy was abducted only two weeks later, killed and dumped only four days after that.

He's growing desperate to find his mate. We may only have a handful of weeks before he tries another boy. We may have even less than that.

He startles when a knock sounds at his open door, his shoulders dropping in relief when the figure darkening his doorway is entirely welcome. A warm smile tugs up his lips, despite his dark mood. "Hey, Alana."

"Hi there," her soft smile makes his heart feel light. "Just finished up a guest lecture. Wondering if you're free for lunch."

Will blinks, frowns, glances to the clock on the wall. One o'clock already? He tries to recall what he's eaten so far today and his stomach grumbles as if on cue to remind him that it was little more than a few cups of coffee. He glances down to the files that are scattered across his desk guiltily, knowing that a break would do him good but also fearing that every minute he doesn't figure this out some other innocent boy is in danger.

You can't help anyone if you don't help yourself, Will. It's Hannibal's voice that comes to him, low and even and making entirely too much sense.

He gives a reluctant nod, standing from his desk and passing around it to join Alana at the doorway. "Lunch sounds great."

Being a Beta, as most women are, Alana is a breath of fresh air for Will, who seems to be struggling with dealing with ambient pheromones more and more as his days without suppressants slip past. It seems as though Jack's displeasure at the stasis of the case hits him harder and harder every time they talk, and it's becoming difficult to avoid the attention of other random Alphas with his heat approaching. When he's scented for the third time that day as they join the lunch queue, Will resolves to obtain some scent dampening spray until his damn heat is past him.

Alana refuses to let him dwell on the case for a full forty minutes while they eat and catch up. Will picks at his questionable salad, wondering wistfully what Hannibal is eating for lunch when he's snapped back to attention by a hand waving before his face.

"Sorry, what was that?" Will blinks rapidly as he realizes that he hasn't been listening to his lunch partner for the last several minutes.

"I was only telling you that I may have met the great love of my life. Nothing important, or anything," she's playfully snarky about his wandering thoughts, and he's grateful for it.

“What were *you* lost in thought about?”

“Hannibal,” he replies automatically, drops his fork when he realizes what he’s said. A grin to rival the Cheshire Cat’s is growing on the Beta’s face. “Not--I mean Hannibal’s food. He had me for dinner last night and I’m still dreaming about that roast.” It’s a weak recovery, but his friend allows it gracefully. “Tell me about this great love,” he casts the line, hoping like hell she’ll take the bait and change the topic.

Alana Bloom is feeling merciful today. Her eyes brighten at the mention and she allows the deflection, launching into a fifteen minute discourse all about the lovely Margot Verger, a female *Alpha*, of all things, which is entirely unexpected. Will makes certain that she retains his apt attention for the rest of lunch.

Will pulls up to the Mayhew residence just after eleven the next morning, taking the chance that at least one of the parents will be home on a Saturday morning. They live in a well-to-do neighborhood, and Will can’t help but note that it’s not far at all from Hannibal’s house. The white two-story ranch house sits modern but modest on a decent-sized plot of land. A glance around shows a larger yard than some of the neighboring houses. Lots of space for a young boy to run around, space for pets. He sees neither as he approaches the door and gives a brisk knock.

He’s still unsure as to whether he’s hoping for or dreading a response when he hears movement inside and the cobalt blue door opens inward.

“Can I help you?” the Alpha within looks run-down, meek. If he’s surprised to see an Omega on his doorstep, he doesn’t show it.

“Mr. Mayhew?” the man nods. “My name is Will Graham. I’m a Special Agent with the FBI.”

Another soft nod. “They found that other boy. The soccer star,” Peter Mayhew notes; the pessimistic part of Will wants to point out that a ten year old can hardly be considered a ‘star player’, regardless of how talented, but nods all the same. After a moment he steps back and gestures Will inside.

“They did,” Will confirms. “I’m trying to gather more information on the boys. See if I can’t find something that would link them all together. I believe this killer is finding them the same way. Some way that would afford an opportunity to watch them.” Will snaps his mouth shut when the Alpha winces at that. *Good job, Graham. I’m sure this man wants to think about how his son was stalked for weeks before being abducted and murdered.*

This is why he doesn’t normally speak to the families.

“If I could maybe take a look around his room, ask some questions?” he tries after a moment, and Mayhew nods.

“Room’s upstairs,” he grunts softly, jerking his head to the flight of stairs behind them.

Will glances around as the father leads the way, taking in the dark and silent house. The shades are drawn, banning the sun from entrance. Will can imagine the space bright and sunny and open, a laughing boy tearing down the stairs and into the sizable living room to watch cartoons on a morning like this. There's a flash of movement in his left peripheral as they reach the top of the stairs, and Will glances over before he can think twice about it.

The Omega in the doorway is sallow, lifeless. Dark circles cradle eyes red from constant tears. His eyes flash over Will once, disinterestedly, before the door between them shuts.

"You'll have to excuse my mate," Mayhew says apologetically as they enter the room down the hall. "He's...been having a hard time of it."

"I can't think of a single person that would be having an easy time of it. Jordan's mother?" Will asks, and the Alpha nods.

"The doctors were sure he was infertile. Jordan was a complete surprise. A happy one," he adds, as though Will could think any differently by the way the man speaks about his son.

Will takes in the room. It's tidy, for being the bedroom of a ten year old boy, with walls a shade of blue too dark for the small space; Will is sure Jordan picked it out himself. There are accents of orange scattered throughout: the pillow case, the lamp on the desk, the standing dresser in the corner. Will drifts over to the bookcase along one wall, stuffed full with so many books that there are two small stacks resting on the very top. There are a few youth novels, but the texts are largely educational. He eyes the picture frame nestled in next to the overflow on top; Jordan Mayhew beams at him, clutching a trophy nearly half the size of himself. There's a slightly balding, bespectacled man standing to Jordan's right with a proud smile on his face, one hand on Jordan's shoulder while the other helps support the large prize.

"They took first for their school last spring. Out of twenty-seven fifth grade groups. Everyone said that Jordan carried their team. He was so excited to participate again this year." Mayhew's voice is a ragged mixture of pride and sorrow. He picks up the picture to study his son. "Kid was going to go places. Ten years old and I knew that. Hell, I knew it when he was five."

"You said fifth grade groups?"

Mayhew nods. "Skipped up from fourth grade last winter. They threw the parental consent form to join the Triathletes at me so fast it made my head spin. They let him join, even though he'd missed the first meet. *Begged* him to join."

Will can see that this conversation is going to get side-railed by sentiment and grief if he doesn't steer it in the right direction. He drops down to his haunches to study the texts on the bookshelf more closely. "Tell me about the Triathletes."

"Not much to tell," he can hear the Alpha sink down onto his son's bed. "It's an extracurricular club, same as any. Need a 3.5 GPA or higher in order to compete in the meets, though I'm pretty sure they allow anyone that's interested in learning go to the monthly meetings. Meets are held quarterly; all the teams that qualify from schools in the district get

together to compete. General trivia, math, history, science. You name it, those kids study it. Within two weeks of joining Jordan had the periodic table memorized."

"Sounds like they take it pretty seriously," Will notes, his lips twitching in a small smile when he sees the textbook for an eighth grade algebra class.

"Serious as any athlete would take their sport. These kids...well, nothing against them, but most of them aren't the type to end up high school quarterback, you know? Jordan certainly wasn't making any teams. Their minds are all they have. Hell, those kids would get together for study groups every day for three hours for *weeks* before a meet, just to make sure they were ready. Some days I couldn't even get Jordan to the table for dinner without a textbook attached to him. Started meeting before school was even in session, even though the meet wasn't until the end of September. Jordan's group...they, uh... They ended up not going to that one."

Will nods to himself. Makes sense. Jordan went missing September 17th, found six days later on the 23rd...Kids would have been in mourning. Will straightens, turns toward the bed. "They'd stay after school for these groups?"

"Yeah. Well, last year at least. Some of the more proactive members thought it would be better to meet at the library. Larger reference section than the school's. You can imagine who spearheaded the campaign to change venues," he flashes Will a proud smile before his eyes drop back to the picture; his knuckles whiten as he tightens his grasp on the frame.

"The Enoch Pratt Free Library? There's one near here, right?"

"There's branches all over Baltimore. But, yeah, there's one right on the way home from Jordan's school. Convenient for a lot of the kids."

"I've taken up enough of your time. Thank you, Mr. Mayhew. You've been very helpful." The Alpha doesn't move; Will sees a tear fall to strike the photo of his dead son. "I'll see myself out," he suggests softly. Mayhew nods.

As soon as he steps out of the room, Will is face to face with Jordan Mayhew, dressed in a somber-looking button-down, blond hair styled formally. The generic blue backdrop of the school photo only serves to showcase his dazzlingly blue eyes. Will thinks of the brilliant ten year old that was so excited to learn that he'd spend his last weeks of summer freedom in a library. Then he thinks about that same boy splayed cold and broken across a lab table at the BAU. Something solid forms in his throat and he turns away, finding himself now face to face with Jordan's grieving mother.

"You're an investigator?" his voice is raw, raspy, as though he's done nothing but scream and sob since his son--the son that the doctors had told him he would never have--was stolen from him four weeks ago.

"Yes, sir," Will answers thickly, his Southern upbringing kicking in automatically with his discomfort. This grief is getting too heavy, suffocating. He needs out of this house.

“You gonna find the monster that killed my boy?” His eyes, red-rimmed though they are, are hard and cold, and Will understands completely the creature that lurks within them.

I know. I want to tear the bastard apart too. “Yes, sir,” he answers again.

The Omega stares at him for a moment before all of the hard hatred seems to deflate from him and he’s simply a grieving mother once more. “Good,” he nods softly, brushes past Will to enter the bedroom where his mate sits with the only version of their son that they will ever be able to hold again.

Will hurries down the stairs and gets to the front door before the silence of the house is split by a mournful sob from the second level. He manages to get the door closed behind him before he sags back and his own wrenches forcefully from his throat to join it.

Will looks up at the elegant home before him, remembers how imposing it seemed the first time he’d come here. Now, it looks like a haven. He doesn’t even remember driving to Hannibal’s.

He should go. It’s the doctor’s day off and he’s unexpected. Uninvited.

Will knocks on the door.

“Will,” the Alpha flashes him a surprised smile and steps aside. “Please, come in. To what do I owe the pleasure?” he asks genially; he’s sporting an apron, though there’s not a smudge of mess on it.

Before Will can respond, a buzz sounds from the kitchen and Hannibal ushers him further inside, depositing Will in a seat at the island before sweeping around the other side to attend to the oven. “I’m interrupting,” Will notes sheepishly.

“Not at all,” Hannibal insists, flicking a switch on the console to turn on the light before peering through the window on the door. He nods to himself, retrieves a hand towel and opens the door, pulling a loaf of freshly baked bread from within and setting it on top of the stove. He turns back to Will, folding the hand towel into a neat square and placing it on the island between them. “I’m only baking. Now, what has you down?”

Will blinks at him, confused for a moment before he remembers that he had broken down crying not twenty minutes prior, the evidence of which is likely written all over his face. Hannibal can probably even smell the sour scent of his distress. “I just came from Jordan Mayhew’s house.”

“That’s the second victim found, yes?” Will nods. “You interviewed the family?” Will can’t blame the slightly incredulous notes to Hannibal’s tone, nods again. “If you’ll excuse me, for one moment,” Hannibal departs before Will can acquiesce or object. He returns a minute later, having retrieved two crystal-cut tumblers and a bottle of scotch from his study.

“It’s barely past noon,” Will points out, though doesn’t resist further when two fingers of amber liquid are pushed across the island toward him.

“You have somewhere to be?” Hannibal questions, though Will is sure he already knows the answer to that. Despite the volume likely being valued at what Will would pay for entire *bottle* of whiskey, he knocks the contents back all the same in answer. Hannibal nods and retrieves the tumbler, fills it anew. “Tell me.”

Will accepts the glass back, though this time he leaves it on the counter, twisting it around slowly and watching the liquor within ripple. “I have to go back on suppressants.” He expects Hannibal to protest immediately. When the man across from him remains silent, Will glances up. His reproachful stare is protest enough. “I can’t do my job this way,” he argues to the silence. “I can’t. I can’t look at these dead little boys--I can’t even do an *interview* without breaking down.”

“You know that suppressants are not an option, Will. There is a reason your physician took you off of them in the first place.”

“Then what am I supposed to do?” Will snaps sharply. He knows his anger is misplaced. He knows that Hannibal’s response is perfectly reasonable, and that he doesn’t deserve this attitude from Will. But he can’t find it in himself to care about any of that right now.

“Your job,” Hannibal responds coolly. “Find the killer. And then you won’t have to look at any more dead boys.”

Will rests his elbows on the stainless steel island, drops his face into his hands. He doesn’t hear Hannibal cross around to join him until he is at Will’s side, placing a comforting hand on the nape of his neck. It’s a presumptuous action for an Alpha to perform on an unbonded Omega. It’s forward and patronizing and Will can’t find it in himself to be outraged by this; can only sag with relief at the sensation.

“I will help you,” his voice is low, strong and sure. It’s a promise, and Will nods weakly in response. “You’re not alone in this,” Hannibal assures him. “Not anymore.”

Will retrieves the case files from his car and he and Hannibal spend the rest of the afternoon going over every detail within them, incorporating the information Will learned from his trip to the Mayhew residence.

“Have you considered the possibility that your killer may be a Beta, rather than an Alpha?” Hannibal suggests after a period of silence studying the boys’ files and Will’s general profile of their suspect.

Will pauses, considers it, wonders why he hasn’t before. “A Beta with an Alpha complex? Or some kind of identity crisis?”

“It would certainly explain his desperate drive to find a mate. There is likely a conscious part of himself that realizes he is seeking a bond he could never form. Almost as if he is obsessed

with disproving his own biology. His choice in prey could be less a tendency toward pedophilia as much as a conscious effort to abduct someone he knows he could overpower. Any Alpha worth their stock should prove physically superior to their mate."

Will studies the Alpha across the table from him, his chest swelling at the man's brilliance. The more he thinks about it the more it seems likely. He spends the next hour reworking his entire profile of the killer.

When evening falls, Hannibal feeds him, and by the time dinner is done Will has had plenty of time for the buzzing warmth of their afternoon scotch to subside enough for him to drive home. He leaves Hannibal's house feeling ten times lighter than when he'd arrived and they resolve to meet the following day to visit the home of the first victim, Andrew Phillips.

Will isn't looking forward to facing another home torn asunder by senseless violence and grief, but he feels a bolstered strength in knowing that Hannibal will be right there with him.

Andrew's mother seems to be holding herself together a bit better than Jordan Mayhew's, but then, she has had a month longer to process her loss and doesn't suffer from the biological traits and impulses that an Omega does. If a Beta woman feels the pull to nurture and protect her offspring, an Omega feels it ten times more viciously. It is an unfortunate horror if a Beta loses a child. It is an outright failure if it happens to an Omega. Such is the way their DNA is coded; they exist to breed and nurture, nothing else. Will despises this particular biological imperative.

She invites them in, leads them to Andrew's room, which is considerably less tidy than Jordan's. *This* is the room of an eleven year old boy; bedsheets rumpled, clothes that didn't quite make it into the laundry hamper in the corner strewn across the floor around it. In lieu of toys, there are comic books and loose sheets of paper with his own drawings scattered across every flat surface of the room.

Hannibal gives a soft smile as he studies the drawings and Will recalls that he himself has a penchant for sketching, wonders vaguely if Hannibal might show them to him, if he asks. He's relieved when Hannibal takes the reins and begins the interview.

He's only half-listening to the conversation, his attention focused on the fact that Andrew, apparently, had a penchant for superheroes. Every comic in sight is an issue of Spider-Man, Thor or the Punisher. Many of his drawings are of these characters, some of heroes that were clearly his own invention. His attention is drawn to a set of *actual* books on the nightstand by the bed. *Where the Red Fern Grows* and *Hatchet*. Not exactly the kind of reading a kid into superhero comics would be tackling in his downtime. Opening the front cover of the top book is enough to confirm his suspicions.

"These are library books," he says out loud, vaguely aware that he's just interrupted Hannibal in the middle of a sentence. He shoots the Alpha an apologetic glance before turning his attention to Mrs. Phillips.

She nods, looking sheepish. “Yes. Frightfully overdue, I know, but I can’t--” her voice cracks and she clears her throat, drifting over to Will and running a tender stroke over the cover of Hatchet. “They were the last things he read and I just...can’t bring myself to return them.”

“A different genre than he’s usually drawn toward,” Will notes, sweeping a perfunctory glance around the room.

Mrs. Phillips nods again, a soft smile gracing her thin lips. “He got it in his head to complete the fifth grade summer reading list before school began. All fifty books. Of course, it didn’t even occur to him to start until after the Fourth, so he was pretty busy those last few weeks,” she gives a soft laugh, shaking her head fondly as if she should have expected nothing different from her son. “Must have been dropping into the library every other day or two some weeks.” She pauses, swallowing thickly, glancing between the two of them. “He only made it about halfway through, but I think...if he’d had the time--” her voice breaks completely then as the tears spill over.

Will steps back to allow Hannibal’s approach to offer comfort, stands uselessly in the middle of the room as he fights back tears of his own.

Will is silent on the ride back to Hannibal’s until they arrive and park. Neither man moves to exit the vehicle.

“If Andrew Phillips was hellbent on finishing that list he’d be making frequent and predictable trips to the library,” Will says softly.

“Jordan Mayhew also spent an inordinate amount of time at the library in the weeks before his abduction,” Hannibal adds.

They seem to turn to look at each other in the same moment.

“Is it enough to investigate?”

Will considers, nods. “It’s enough. It will be stronger if we can find a connection between Trevor Walton and Enoch Pratt, but it’s enough to look into all the same.”

“Enoch Pratt?” Hannibal repeats.

“The free public library. There are branches all over the city, including the three neighborhoods that the boys lived in. It might not be *anything* but--”

“An acquaintance of mine hosts various charity galas. Enoch Pratt held one such gala this previous winter. They raised a substantial amount, planned to dump the money into building expansions, technological upgrades--”

“Increasing staff?” Will ventures; Hannibal’s face says it all. “I need to get to Quantico,” Will insists, “I have to talk to Jack.”

Hannibal is already restarting the Bentley.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Will goes into heat; Hannibal, as ever, is a gracious and generous host.

Chapter Notes

Hello, darlings! I am back with a stupidly fast update and it is time to earn that E rating! Enjoy the porn.

There are twenty-one branches of Enoch Pratt in various neighborhoods around Baltimore. Each one employs at least half a dozen staff; some static, some rotational. They also have a roster of almost a hundred volunteers throughout the city. It is a substantial list to comb through, but it's more than they had a day ago, and the odds are that the list will be at least halved by the time they cut out any females.

Will will not be combing through this list himself. Will wakes up an aching, shivering, sweat-drenched mess on Monday morning and curses his biology as he realizes that he has slipped into preheat overnight. Within two, possibly three days, Will is going to be in full blown heat and completely useless to everyone.

Hell, he's useless *now*.

The first thing he does is drag his laptop over to his bed, grateful that he left it in reaching distance, and sends out an email to his class list to cancel lectures for the day. Then he sends out a group email to the list of instructors that have covered his classes in the past. He receives an immediate, pre-programmed response from one of them indicating that they are out of the country on holiday but will be returning November 1st. Within the hour, Alana has replied that she can cover his classes for the week, and even into the following Tuesday if she is needed. He begins a private email chain with her in response to voice his eternal gratitude.

He closes his laptop and pushes it away, twisting restlessly on the bed. Comfort is not a possibility. He longs to take a shower, refresh, even just change the sheets so that his bed isn't damp and cold, but he can't will himself to stand up at the moment, let alone perform actual *tasks*.

He gropes the nightstand until he finds his cellphone and dials the kennel that he uses when he gets called out of town to arrange lodging for the week for his pack. His pack that are very aware that he has been awake for awhile now and has yet to feed them or let them outside.

Will groans, rolling out of bed and clicking tersely to corral the mutts to the front door, where they burst forth with abandon as soon as it is opened for them. He leaves the screen door propped open to encourage the fresh, cool air to filter in and uses the pack's distraction to stumble to the kitchen and prepare their breakfast. There is one more task that he's yet to complete and is willfully putting off all the same.

When he's managed to strip the sheets, as well as his own soaked night clothes, and burrows back into the bare mattress with naught but his rumpled duvet for comfort, Will sighs and pulls his phone toward him once more.

He considers calling, but just the thought of hearing the Alpha's voice on the other end of the line is enough to send a fission of heat zipping up his spine, makes his insides clench with longing. He opts to do something that he has never done in almost a year of acquaintance.

He texts Hannibal Lecter.

I'm in preheat.

He shoots off the first message with hardly a thought, considers and sends a second.

Sorry, I don't know if you text. I have a feeling your voice might send me into full-blown heat.

Will cringes to himself as soon as he hits send. Why the *hell* did he decide to tell Hannibal *that*?! Despite himself, his stomach flips when his phone buzzes with a new message a minute later.

It's quite alright, I understand completely. I will begin preparations for your arrival.

Another message loads as he's reading the first.

I hope you are not too uncomfortable. I have read that a lukewarm bath as well as herbal tea can help to alleviate the symptoms of preheat.

...It occurs to me that you've as much chance of owning herbal tea as you do a proper tea kettle with which to prepare it.

Will can't help but laugh at that.

Is Lipton not herbal? He responds snarkily, wishes that he could see the way Hannibal's lip would curl with disgust at the name.

Fortunate for you that I will be equally detained for the week, lest you find yourself returning home to a respectfully stocked kitchen.

A fond smile pulls at Will's lips, a warmth blossoming in his chest that he can't attribute to his budding heat. The thought of being in the presence of another person for his heat--for that person to be the capable and willing psychiatrist that he has been drawn to for the better part of a year--makes his stomach flip. The next time he is face to face with Hannibal things are going to get very personal *very* fast. Will is unsure what their relationship will look like on the other side of this week. Perhaps it's just the oncoming heat taking control, but he finds

that he can't bring himself to care. They will be able to remain friendly, at the very least. Hannibal would never have suggested this if he didn't think it were possible.

He wants to keep flirting (Is that what they are doing? Flirting?), decides that it is better to get down to brass tax. They are pressed for time at the moment.

When will you be ready for me?

By tomorrow morning, for certain. I will use this day to shop and prepare food for the week.

I'll get my pack sorted out and stop at the pharmacy today. Head over first thing tomorrow, if that's alright.

Certainly.

If tomorrow you find that you are unfit to drive, please, do not hesitate to call me.

He shoots back a brief 'thank you', effectively ending their conversation. By this time the dogs have wandered back inside, devoured their breakfast, and many have returned to their beds in front of the hearth.

Will should eat something himself. He should take a bath, as Hannibal suggested, or make some tea, though despite his ribbing he is truly dubious as to the effectiveness of the instant brew he has on hand. Instead, he shudders and whimpers as another deep ache pulses through him, grips his duvet and slides onto the floor. He crawls just far enough to assimilate himself into the nest of warm fur and wet, snuffling noses, and drifts to sleep.

By the following morning, Will's symptoms have abated enough for him to feel confident in making the drive to Baltimore. He packs a single change of clothes for when his heat ends, fighting the blush blooming across his cheeks at the thought of spending several days with Hannibal *naked*. He knows that once his heat is in full swing this is not something that he will feel self-conscious over in the least. In the meantime…

Jack calls just as he's parking and Will curses. He forgot to tell Jack. How in the *hell* did he forget to tell *Jack*?

"Will. We got the list from Enoch Pratt. Need you down at Quantico; how soon can you be here?"

Will clears his throat, rubs his neck sheepishly though there's no one around to see him do it. "Yeah, that's uh, that's not going to be possible for a few days. I'm going into heat."

He can hear the Alpha huff on the other end of the line, annoyed that his plans have been upset. "Fine timing."

Will grits his teeth, tamps down the urge to snap back at him. "It's not exactly something I can control, Jack," he points out tightly.

A resigned sigh. “Yeah, you’re right. I’ll try Dr. Lecter then.”

Before Will can let him know that he’s not going to have much luck there either, Jack has hung up. He sighs and exits the car and anticipation sits heavy and tingling at the base of his spine as he approaches the house.

Hannibal is on the phone when he opens the door for Will and beckons him inside. “I understand, Jack, but unfortunately as it stands I am simply unavailable this week. Best of luck to you,” he ends the call and slips the phone into his pocket, turning to Will with a warm smile. “Good morning, Will. How are you feeling today?”

“A lot better. First day’s always the worst. From what I remember, at least,” he shuffles a step closer so Hannibal can close the door and catches a trace of his scent on the air from the movement. A shudder wracks down Will’s spine and he fidgets uncomfortably as a hot flash washes through him. Hannibal smells *good*, like virile Alpha; heady and musky and it is affecting Will even more than it did when he scented him last week. He clears his throat and leans away, turning his head to breathe in the other direction; focuses on slow, deep inhales despite the rabbiting of his heart.

“Your room is just upstairs,” Hannibal explains, leading the way. Will has never been upstairs before. Every door is closed but one, which Hannibal stops at. Will wonders which is the master bedroom. “I apologize for the chill. I opened a few windows after getting the furniture moved around to clear out the scent.”

He allows Will passage through and his heart beats ever harder at the sight of the room. Hannibal has pushed the frame for the queen-size bed off to the side on the far wall; the mattress sits in a corner, strategically placed so that Will will feel closed in and protected on two sides. A stack of linens and several blankets are folded neatly one the corner of the mattress, just waiting for an Omega to rumple and twist them up into a nest. It feels like his chest expands impossibly at the sight, filling with a warmth that is quickly growing familiar and is ever associated with Hannibal.

“You didn’t have to do all this,” Will begins, rubbing his neck as his face flames with a blush. He turns back to Hannibal, finds that the Alpha is waiting patiently at the threshold. *He doesn’t want to bring his scent into the room,* Will realizes, feels that fond warmth flood him all over again.

“Of course I did. I want you comfortable here, Will. In any case,” his lips quirk into a wry grin, the likes of which Will has never seen before, “it wasn’t exactly a great labor. Now, I was just about to start a late breakfast. I’ll let you get to it,” he nods to the bare mattress, “and let you know when it’s ready.” Will opens his mouth to protest the effort but Hannibal heads him off at the pass. “It’s important to intake as many calories as possible preceding a heat, Will. For the next few days your body will be burning through your reserves faster than you’ll be able to take in.”

His tone brooks no argument, not that Will has any stable one to cling to. He knows that Hannibal is completely right. In the past by this point Will would have inhaled nearly everything in his kitchen to prepare. It’s the thought of being provided for, being *nourished by* an Alpha that is setting off the warning bells in his mind. Will is not accustomed to

accepting such things from an Alpha. It sets... *expectations*. Hannibal has fed him before, of course, as he feeds all of his friends. But now, on the cusp of his heat, it just feels like... *more*.

What's worse, Will isn't entirely sure if the idea bothers him.

He shakes the train of thought off, turning his attention to the sheets and blankets that Hannibal left for him, picks up one folded sheet to caress the material. It's the softest cotton he's ever felt, likely a higher thread count than Will has even imagined existing. The whole queen-sized set likely costs more than Will paid for his mattress. He shakes it out and bundles it up in his arms, and the way the fabric slides against his skin is not unlike water. It's the perfect material for a nest; it will be soft and comforting against Will's aching skin but not so warm that he will feel stifled in his cocoon.

He gets to work.

This isn't working.

Will has tried layering the thicker blankets through with the sheets, has tried bundling them up as a barrier against the walls, has tried ridding of the blankets altogether. He's tried manipulating the sheets on the mattress as a base to lie on with the others forming a cover over him, he's tried rumpling the sheets into individual bundles and nestling into them, he's tried swaddling himself as best as he can with no extra hands to tuck in the edges of the sheets, but nothing feels *right*.

Every time he crawls into the nest he finds himself fidgeting restlessly. A distressed whine slips from his throat as he throws the sheets off and pushes himself to his knees to regard the mess around him. This should not be so difficult; he's thirty-four damn years old.

He's relieved when Hannibal knocks on the door to let him know that breakfast is ready. Maybe when he's full and sleepy he'll be able to settle in naturally without overthinking this. He plods downstairs and settles into his seat at the dining room table, painfully aware that he is having little success in masking his frustration. He perks, at least, when he sees the veritable feast Hannibal has laid out for them.

Silver dollar pancakes, scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage, fresh fruit; it looks like a spread right out of a movie and it makes Will salivate.

"Something to drink?" Hannibal inquires. "Water, juice?"

"Juice would be great," Will responds, and Hannibal nods as though this were the answer he was expecting. He gestures for Will to plate up as he slips back to the kitchen, returning with a tall glass of apple juice. Will downs half of it in one go, his body starving for the sugar. "This is great, thank you," he nods to the plate before him, stuffed just about as it can be without food spilling over the sides.

Hannibal allows him to eat in silence for a moment before he prods. "Is everything alright with the room, Will? Are the sheets comfortable enough?"

Will sighs, setting down the pineapple chunk he had just speared with his fork and looking over the table at Hannibal. “The room is fantastic. The sheets are perfect. It’s not...it’s not any of that stuff. It’s me. I can’t make it work.”

He always knew that he wasn’t like most of his gender. He’s never cared about finding an Alpha to take care of him, or breeding until his house is swarming with pups to nurture. He’s always been more interested in making his own way, having a career. He’s well aware that all of this, combined with his unhindered, uncontrollable empathy, makes him more than a little strange. But now he’s failing on even the most biologically-driven of levels. He’s a joke of an Omega, unable even to build a nest.

Embarrassment claws at his chest. His eyes sting, and it’s only when he looks down at his blurring plate that he realizes it’s from beginnings of tears prickling at his eyes. His breath hitches in his chest when a warm hand covers his own, the sensation bringing him back to reality enough for him to realize that a low whine of distress had been slipping from his chest. He pulls his gaze back up to Hannibal.

“We’ll sort it out, Will. First, breakfast,” he nods back to Will’s plate and Will picks up his fork obediently.

“What seems to be the problem?” Hannibal asks from the doorway as Will settles into the mess of sheets once more.

“You might as well come in,” he tells him, and Hannibal drifts closer. “I don’t know,” he answers after a moment, fluffing and flattening a few random sheets around him. “I haven’t nested in a decade. Even when I’ve been sick the only thing I’d end up doing is grabbing my comforter and curling up on the floor with my pack--Oh,” he murmurs as the answer strikes him, and Hannibal makes a soft, inquisitive sound. He looks up at the Alpha. “I’m lonely. When I nest for comfort I always do it with my dogs. They’re warm and comforting and they keep me safe. I’m just...not accustomed to nesting alone.”

“Well, that’s easy enough to fix,” Hannibal replies, and Will can’t stop his snort of laughter from bursting forth as he shuffles about the sheets some more.

“Yeah? You gonna go get my pack from the kennel and let them--” Will freezes when he glances back to Hannibal to find that the Alpha has removed his shirt. “ *Oh*,” he says again.

Hannibal nods at him. “You’ll be more comfortable if you divest yourself of your clothing as well. It’s liable to get quite warm otherwise.”

Will nods in agreement, can’t seem to make any movement to comply. He can’t seem to do anything over than stare at Hannibal’s broad chest, with it’s oddly alluring rug of silver hair, and lick his dry lips. When Hannibal has folded up his pants and set them aside on a chair he approaches the nest calmly, slowly sinking to his knees in front of Will. Will allows him to tug off his shirt, and the cool air against his flaming skin is enough to break the spell. He moves to take off his pants before Hannibal can make the attempt, kicking them to the side of

the mattress. He remembers too late that he neglected to put on briefs that morning, knowing that eventually his slick would only make a mess of them. Hannibal doesn't seem to mind.

They regard each other on their knees in silence for a moment, and the air around them feels thicker, charged; the way it did when Will stood on Hannibal's doorstep and dared to scent the handsome Alpha. He closes his eyes at the memory, and somehow the darkness, though it's only his own, makes it easier to act. He leans forward, just close enough to feel the heat coming off of the other man but not enough to touch, and takes in a slow, deep inhale. Hannibal's scent and pheromones flood his senses immediately, sending an alarming jolt down his spine. When Hannibal's hands come up to rest gently on his hips, just as he'd wished they would the last time he'd scented him, desire coils hot in Will's belly.

He guides Will down into the sheets, pulling at them here and there until they are nestled in together, face to face. It's only when he feels the safety of the wall at his back and the comfort of Hannibal enveloping his front that Will is able to open his eyes again. Hannibal is watching him; there's a soft, fond expression on his face, his amber eyes gentle as they track over Will's features. He's still got one hand resting on Will's bare hip.

"Feel better?" his voice is low and rich, somehow soothing Will and exciting him all at once. Will nestles slightly closer to him in response. "There's a conversation I think we should have, before you are too lost to the hormones of your heat. I wanted to go over your consent before we begin."

Will gives him a wry smirk. "I'm going to be in heat, Hannibal. Consent is pretty much thrown out the window when my body is begging for a knot."

"Your body's biological needs do not equate to blanket consent, Will, and what you find acceptable during that time may be wildly different to how you would feel under normal circumstances. Regardless of how much you remember, I would hate for our relationship to end up disjointed after this because you feel that I overstepped."

Will stares at him. It's hard enough to retain composure just *thinking* about what is going to be happening between them. Now Hannibal wants to *talk* about it as well? Will may very well die of embarrassment before his heat even strikes. "...Okay...gimme a for instance," Will relents. Perhaps if he just acquiesces they can get this over with quickly.

"May I kiss you?"

Will's heart stops for a moment, begins again at double-time. He was *not* expecting *that*. "Do...well, I mean, do you *want* to?" he stutters; his face is growing warm, he knows that he's blushing. He can even feel it in the tips of his ears.

"It is what *you* want that we are discussing, Will. I find it a pleasant notion, but I can understand if it's too intimate a gesture for what we are doing."

A pleasant notion. Will wonders how long Hannibal has thought so. He swallows thickly. "You can kiss me," he responds softly, and Hannibal gives a pleased nod. Will shifts closer yet, finally giving into the temptation to curl his fingers through the hair on Hannibal's chest.

Hannibal tugs his hip forward gently until Will's top leg slots between his own. "What, uh, what else do you want to know?"

"May I taste you?"

A bolt of desire twists through him, travels directly to his groin; his cock twitches at the thought. His mouth feels too dry to speak. "Yes," he breathes.

"Work you open with my tongue?" Hannibal's voice is impossibly steady considering the beautifully filthy words that are tumbling from his mouth.

A shiver wracks Will's body, only sends him closer into the arms of the Alpha before him. The large hand on his hip slips around to his low back to encourage the movement. Damn his imagination; just thinking about it conjures a ghost of the sensation and Will can't stop the pitiful mewl that squeaks from his throat. He drops his head forward to Hannibal's chest, nods; he's vaguely aware that his fingers have curled into claws to clutch at Hannibal's chest. His breathing has gone shallow and ragged and each new inhale of that perfect Alpha scent sends another rush of blood to Will's rapidly thickening cock.

Hannibal's soft lips brush across his sweaty temple, drag along the shell of his ear. His breath is hot as he murmurs, "And if I want to suck you off?"

Will pulls back in alarm at that, his eyes searching Hannibal's in confusion. No Alpha has *ever* offered to do that for Will. He was under the impression that it was something Alphas simply didn't do; too close to an act of submission. "Why would you want to do that?"

Hannibal isn't thrown by Will's surprise. He gives a low chuckle and brings one warm hand up to brush along Will's jaw tenderly. "A knot may be the only way to satisfy your biological cravings, but that doesn't mean you can't enjoy other forms of pleasure as well." He guides Will a bit closer, rests their foreheads together. "I want this to be an enjoyable experience for you, Will. Your pleasure is my pleasure."

Will trembles in Hannibal's arms at the sentiment. His head is beginning to feel thick, fuzzy. *I'm going into heat*, Will realizes dizzily. *He's sending me into full-blown heat just by talking to me*. "You can," Will finally pants when he finds his voice again. A pleased purr rumbles through Hannibal's chest and Will gives a small whimper. "What else?"

"Is there anything that you would like to expressly forbid me from doing?"

"No biting," Will supplies, though Hannibal is such a gentleman he's sure the thought never occurred to him.

"Of course," Hannibal agrees.

"I mean...no...no mating bite. You know I'll probably ask when I'm...but if you want to do it somewhere else, you can. If you want."

Will's cock is painfully hard, and he becomes aware that his hips are jerking in small, aborted thrusts against Hannibal. He can feel when his erection brushes against Hannibal's leg that he

is leaking all over him, but Hannibal doesn't seem to mind; the hand that was stroking along his low back a moment ago has drifted down to the swell of his ass, applies gentle, rhythmic pressure to encourage Will's thrusts.

Hannibal gives a low hum at that. "Anywhere below the neck," he clarifies, twisting their bodies until Will is flat on his back and Hannibal is suspended over him. Will nods and continues his thrusts. He's so close already, *so close*. "Such as...here?" Hannibal breathes against his skin, opens his mouth to place a wet kiss to Will's collarbone.

A gasp is wrenched from his throat at the new sensation. His skin is hot and itchy and he aches everywhere that Hannibal isn't touching. He wraps his arms around Hannibal's broad back to hold him closer. "Yes," Will breathes.

Hannibal earns another gasp as his tongue flicks playfully over one of Will's nipples. "Here?" he places a wet kiss to Will's chest. Another.

"Yes, *yes*," Will moans, writhing.

He can feel Hannibal's smirk pressed against his chest. He's far too gone to feel annoyed about it. When Hannibal speaks again, it's directly against his skin, so that every brush of lips and tongue sends jolt after delicious jolt through Will. "And if I should draw blood?"

"Oh, *God*," Will cries out as he comes, bringing his hands up to fist in Hannibal's impossibly soft hair so that he can pull his lips up to his own. When Hannibal's tongue slips into his mouth, he feels as though his orgasm is cresting a second time. Hannibal holds Will securely in his arms as his body shudders with each pulse of pleasure. Their mouths don't break apart until it becomes essential to breathe, but even then they don't go far.

After a few minutes, wherein the only sound to quake the air is Will's heaving pants, Will realizes that his orgasm did not quell the rising desire within him. Rather, it seems to have done little more than stoke the flame in his core. He feels a gush of slick rush from him and he aches, *aches* to be filled. Hannibal's nostrils flare at the new scent, his eyes darkening with desire.

"I want you to talk to me like that, during," Will pants. "Your *voice*," he moans, pulls Hannibal's lips to his own more once. "Your voice, your scent, your body," he arches up against Hannibal, grinds against the substantial erection that has grown between them. "I need it. I need you. *Alpha*."

He's growing delirious with want. His cock is beginning to thicken anew already. Hannibal shushes him, presses his own hard cock against Will so that he knows it's there.

"I've got you, beautiful boy," he whispers into Will's ear as his hot hands drift slowly to explore his body. "I'll see you satisfied."

His low, purring voice, sinfully erotic as he whispers praise and reassurances alike, is the last coherent thing that Will remembers.

Ever since they met, Hannibal has been intrigued by the FBI profiler. The fact that he was an Omega played little into this attraction, with the exception of the curiosity of the man's pull to his violent field. The pure empathy was interesting, thrilling to think that he might have finally met a creature that could truly understand him. And with the man's blatant excessive force in taking down Garrett Jacob Hobbs and the resulting conversation in which he admitted to *enjoying* it…

Hannibal's curious attention morphed into full-blown obsession the *second* the profiler let him see a glimpse of the darkness within. Hannibal's own beast purred in response, grew claws and paced within him restlessly, waiting for just the right moment. For a time, Hannibal fancied the idea that the empath had been sent to him so that he need never walk the world alone again.

Now, with his body flushed and panting and *writhing* beneath him, his sweet, earthy pheromones and the spicy musk of his slick filling the air, Hannibal is certain.

Will Graham was sent to ruin him.

Will is the Omega in heat. Will is meant to be the one lost to his biology, delirious with desire. So it is mildly irritating for Hannibal, when Will finally slips into the throes of heat, that he can do little more for several minutes than use his hands and lips to map out and worship the man beneath him.

His tongue becomes intimately acquainted with the shape of Will's collarbones, the hollow at the base of his throat. He dares a swipe over the Adam's apple that had drawn his gaze every time the man swallowed, but Will squirms and lets out an uncomfortable whine at the attention to his neck, so Hannibal moves on.

He tastes the sweat that glistens across Will's chest, pausing to nibble gently at the nipples that have pebbled from the combination of the chilly air and his arousal. He maps out the contours of Will's abdomen, tasting the salty, umami flavor of the release that had coated both of their stomachs, and dips into his belly button, which produces a delightful squirm in the Omega beneath him. By this time Will's cock has filled completely again, and lay red and weeping against stomach. Hannibal brings his focus to the sack that hangs heavy between his legs, first burying his nose into Will's groin to obtain the most concentrated scent of him, and then running his tongue from balls to head and sucking gently at the fluid that leaks out for him.

"Alpha," Will groans, shifting restlessly beneath him, "*Please*."

"Very well, darling boy. You want my knot?"

Will lets out a keening whine in response. Hannibal nods, slipping out of his briefs. He has days, after all, to become intimately familiar with every inch of Will Graham. He may as well do as he promised now and relieve the growing ache of the Omega.

He pulls up to capture Will's lips once more, but in his delirium Will can do little more than mouth at him ineffectively. "Turn over for me, sweet thing," he murmurs against his lips, and

Will purrs in response, moving to flip his body around as soon as Hannibal rises up enough to let him.

He moves to his elbows and knees, arching his spine and sinking immediately into a most alluring presentation. “Beautiful,” Hannibal murmurs, strokes along his spine and hips and Will preens and purrs at his approval. He uses both hands to expose Will’s blushing hole, wants nothing more than to sink his tongue into the entrance, taste Will fully and work him open until he is completely undone. As it is, the poor boy has been waiting long enough for his knot. He resolves to make things last next time; he had no idea how effective his play talk would be on the Omega. Will is one unpredictability after the next, and each surprise sprung seems to be more pleasant than the last.

He probes him with two fingers, to begin, finding Will’s entrance more than ready to accept him. Will whimpers beneath him, wagging his hips and flexing back to encourage more penetration. “I know, darling. I need to stretch you, first,” he murmurs, spreading his fingers to encourage Will to loosen for him. When he adds the third, he drives straight in and crooks his fingers to stroke Will’s prostate. If he has to wait for a knot he may as well get *some* pleasure from this.

The sound that leaves Will’s throat is pure sex. He shudders on Hannibal’s fingers, throws himself back in search of that feeling once more. Hannibal works him open for another minute. It’s tempting to manipulate his prostate even more, but he doesn’t want Will to come again until his cock is buried deep inside him.

“Alpha,” Will moans, “Hannibal, *please*, I’m ready for you. Knot me. *Please,*” Will babbles, and hearing his name spill from Will’s lips in delirium is enough to break down the last bit of Hannibal’s self-restraint.

A growl tears from his throat and Will stills beneath him in anticipation. Hannibal grasps his hips and pulls them up just a bit higher, lines up his achingly hard cock and thrusts into Will’s tight heat in one go.

He stills once he is buried within him, has to, and they both let out a satisfied groan at the sensation. Will feels *exquisite*; hot, wet silk, wrapped around his cock, pulsing with desire and need. Will squirms beneath him when he declines to move, attempting to thrust back onto him. Hannibal’s grip tightens on his hips, moves one hand up to grasp firmly at the nape of his neck. Will falls pliant beneath him with a soft whine.

“*That’s* it, lovely,” he lets out an encouraging purr. “You just let me take care of you.”

When he’s certain he can move without falling to pieces immediately, Hannibal pulls out and slides back into Will; Will lets out an appreciative moan beneath him. He picks up his pace, pushing harder and faster with each thrust. When Will begins to produce a constant purr, Hannibal feels more confident in his rough treatment.

He releases Will’s neck, bringing both hands to his hips and digging his claws in fiercely as he fucks away, his knot growing steadily with each thrust. “Are you ready, darling?” he asks, but it’s more for play than necessity. Even in the delirium of heat Will is more than capable of voicing his needs.

“*Alpha*,” Will cries out, “*Knot*!”

It’s all Hannibal needs, thrusting in once more forcefully until his knot slips into Will’s tight hole and the last of it fills out as he pumps his seed deep into his mate. He lets himself drape over Will’s back, knowing that being covered by his Alpha at this moment is an assurance of safety and comfort. He moves a hand to slip beneath Will to stroke him off, but Will is already coming, untouched, so fulfilled by Hannibal’s knot that he cries out his ecstasy as his release spills across the sheets beneath them. Hannibal’s vision whites out momentarily at the vice clench around him.

When they’ve both taken their pleasure, Hannibal adjusts them carefully until they are laying on their sides, spooning. It will be at least twenty minutes before his knot deflates enough to pull out of Will, and they will be much more comfortable this way.

Will purrs as Hannibal holds him close, running his hands appreciatively over the marvelous form that he’s wrapped around. “So good,” Will sighs, nuzzling back into him even further.

Hannibal presses a chaste kiss to the nape of Will’s neck. “Yes, love. You were incredible.” He lays another soft kiss upon him as a warm, satisfied sleepiness flows through him.

It’s only when Will is dozing peacefully in his arms and sleep is taking him fully that he realizes he’s already begun thinking of Will as his mate. He resolves then and there that he will do anything to see that through.

Hannibal opens the door and pauses at the threshold, eyes slipping shut as he fills his lungs. For the last four days they have done little more than fill this room with their combined scent; sweat and musk, slick and come. Hannibal was delighted to quickly discover that the only thing more tantalizing than the scent of Will Graham in heat was that of the Omega reeking of his own scent as well. He shuts the door behind him--the scent of sex is liable to invade the rest of his house if he doesn’t, and then Hannibal would truly get nothing done--and slips back into what had once served as a nest; most of the blankets and soiled sheets have long since been shoved aside. Will rests there, nude but for a single sheet wrapped around him, and stirs languidly at Hannibal’s return.

He tells himself that the hand that slips through Will’s sweaty, tangled curls is only to further rouse the Omega. “It’s time to eat, Will.”

Will turns more fully toward Hannibal with a soft hum and a sleepy grin on his face, opening his mouth expectantly. Hannibal can’t help his smile. To say it was challenging to keep the boy fed through first few days of heat is an understatement; he was far more interested in receiving nourishment from Hannibal in less practical ways than by taking a break for something as banal as food. Hannibal rewards his cooperation with a chunk of fresh pineapple. The fruit is high in vitamins and sugar, with the added bonus of being easy to prepare and serve.

The fact that he has come to learn that Will’s pink tongue will slip out to wrap around his fingers, chasing the juices of the fresh fruit, has absolutely no bearing on his choice of fare.

Will gives another pleased hum at the taste and Hannibal feeds him another, this time paired with a small sliver of parmesan. He's able to get him to accept a piece of prosciutto as well, and then Will surprises him by propping himself up on an elbow and considering the plate in Hannibal's hands. He plucks from it a red grape and brings it to his lips, grasping at half of the sphere lightly with his teeth and, with a cheeky smirk, tilts his head up toward Hannibal in offering.

And how could Hannibal resist such an offer? He leans down to accept the other half, and the two of them clamp down to split into the fruit simultaneously. Sweet juice bursts in his mouth, but Hannibal is too busy chasing the flavor of Will's lips to appreciate it. Will licks into his mouth the first chance he gets, brings his hands up to tug away the robe that Hannibal had slipped into for his trip to the kitchen. The fruit and cheese platter is discarded...somewhere...and then Hannibal is on his back, with a grinning Omega hanging over him.

"You seem to be coming back to yourself," Hannibal notes, for it's the first time that Will has been able to do much more than paw at him and present himself for mounting in several days. Will gives another soft hum and swings one of his legs over Hannibal's hips to straddle him more effectively. To see the Omega wielding such control is more erotic than having him completely at his mercy, and Hannibal can feel himself thickening quickly--a response that is encouraged enthusiastically as Will rocks his hips to grind them together. Will is already hard, rubbing and leaking against his stomach, and when the scent of freshly running slick meets his nose, Hannibal is lost.

Will's jaw parts as he scents the air and his head tips back with a groan when he detects Hannibal's arousal. All at once he has dropped low, their hips flush together and their chests barely brushing as Will hovers above him. "Mmm, *Alpha*," he breathes into the crook of Hannibal's neck as he takes another deep breath. He surprises Hannibal by tonguing his scent gland briefly, moving further down the column of his neck to place wet kisses. "So good to me," he croons lowly, rocking their hips together once more.

"*Will*," Hannibal breathes back, because he cannot bear for the name to be held from his lips any longer. "Beautiful Will. You are truly a magnificent creature."

Will pulls himself up to sit across him, preening at the praise, and then lifts his hips, reaching between them to guide Hannibal's cock to his entrance, sinking down fully with no hesitation. After four days of being taken he requires little to no stretching to take Hannibal's knot. They both let out a low groan when their hips are flush once more. Will pants lowly, rocking his hips to move Hannibal within him. He leans back and twists again, whimpering when the angle proves effective at stimulating his prostate, and then does it again. Hannibal brings his hands up to grasp Will's hips--not to control, but to stabilize, encourage.

Will needs little encouragement. He chases his own pleasure brazenly, fisting his weeping cock to tug forcefully when he can feel Hannibal's knot begin to inflate within him. Their pleasure crests at the same time, Will's hot seed painting Hannibal's stomach and chest as he himself spills within the Omega. Will drapes across him then, confident, comfortable, unheeding of the mess between them. He falls pliant against Hannibal's body, tucking his head beneath his Alpha's chin, and purrs.

Hannibal, with naught much else to do, wraps his arms around the boy to rub his hands tenderly along his back, down his sides, alternating between whispering strokes and firmly kneading the muscles which must be quite sore by now. He dips his head down to drag his lips through Will's dark hair. "When we can part again, I think we should take advantage of this clarity and take a bath."

Will doesn't move from his position, so his voice is slightly muffled with his face still buried in Hannibal's chest. "Together?"

Hannibal isn't sure if it's a question or a request. "Of course."

Will's purr rumbles just a bit more fiercely.

The water temperature is perfect, just on the comfortable side of scalding, the liquid slightly milky for the essential oils he has added. For the first time in days, Hannibal's nose scents something other than Will and sex and itches unpleasantly for it. This downfall is recompensed only by having the Omega between his legs, sprawled against him with his cheek glued to Hannibal's chest. Deft fingers trace idle patterns across his chest and down his arm.

"Want to stay," Will murmurs drowsily against his skin, and Hannibal isn't certain if he means to say that he wishes to stay together in the bath or that he wishes to stay with Hannibal indefinitely. Either way Hannibal's chest swells with pride and longing.

"You can stay, beautiful boy," he breathes into Will's damp curls. He wonders at how much he can say to Will at this time, now that his heat is abating and some cognitive ability seems to be returning to him. He wonders how much Will will remember of this heat, extended and rigorous as it's been. "I will keep you," he whispers into Will's ear, perhaps inadvisably.

He can't regret the rash statement, however, due to the way that Will perks up at it. He tilts his face up from Hannibal's chest, brushes their lips together lazily. "Yours," he states softly; it almost sounds like a question.

Hannibal presses their lips more firmly together, licking into the Omega's mouth to taste his tongue in a deep, slow kiss before he finally pulls away and guides Will's head back down to rest on his chest, bringing a hand up to stroke through is hair.

"Mine," he confirms, tightening his arms around the slender form against him.

I am truly lost.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> Will wakes from the daze of his heat to find that Hannibal has a proposition for him. The killer's identity is discovered.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Will comes to he is wrapped in a soft sheet, with beams of sunlight striping through the partially drawn curtains to warm him. He sighs and stretches his limbs, grunting in satisfaction as more than a few joints pop with the effort. He sits up, blinking about blearily. By the light in the room it is still only mid-morning. He is alone.

He takes his time standing, feeling simultaneously lax from pleasure and weak from hunger, and gives another great stretch when he finds his balance. He glances down, scents himself, finds that he doesn't smell too offensive. He's bathed recently, then. Images and words snap through his mind at the thought. Very recently. He spots a bathrobe draped across the chair next to the nest and slips into it without a thought, heading for the exit. He knows where he will find his mate.

Hannibal, he corrects hastily in his mind.

Hannibal will be in the kitchen cooking, he is sure; he'll have known that Will's heat was ending soon. He's surprised to find that he feels no trepidation, no embarrassment at the prospect of seeing the Alpha. Rather, a nervous thrill shivers through him. He doesn't know exactly what happened during his heat, though he can make a pretty solid guess all things considered, but all the same he feels no shame. Surprising, given his bashful state just a few days earlier. In fact, he feels more attuned to his own body than he can ever recall.

He's greeted with the mouth-watering scent of sizzling meat, the thick starch of pancakes and the sweetness of fresh fruit as he enters the kitchen. Hannibal tosses him a cursory glance over his shoulder from the stove.

"Good morning," he greets as he lifts a frying pan and shakes about its contents.

"G'morning," Will murmurs back thickly, licking his lips at the sight before him. Hannibal has essentially recreated the breakfast feast they had shared when Will had arrived, though this time Will could recognize the protein scramble in the remaining pan on the stove.

"Please, help yourself," Hannibal nods his head to the place settings at the island and Will sits, scooping up some grapes onto his plate before spearing at a few pancakes on the serving

platter. “I’m afraid we burned through my stores of bacon during your heat, but I did still have some sausage on hand.”

He turns toward the island with the pan, portioning out some of the mixture onto Will’s plate as well as the setting next to him.

“Only one form of breakfast meat,” Will chides playfully. “And I was about to rate this heat stay at five stars. The *horror*.” He snaps down on a grape forcefully for dramatic effect, can’t help but notice the way Hannibal’s gaze snaps to his lips at the action. A heated shiver passes down his spine and he makes a conscious effort not to bring his tongue out to wet them.

“I shall endeavor to plan ahead, in the future,” Hannibal responds wryly, drifting toward the fridge. “Juice?”

He nods, his mouth stuffed full of his bite of pancakes. Hannibal fills two glasses and walks around the island to take a seat next to Will.

“Forgive me, I thought a more informal breakfast would suit--”

“I don’t care where I eat, Hannibal,” Will chuckles as he spears a bite of sausage. “I still don’t think you needed to go to so much trouble, though.”

“I disagree,” Hannibal’s tone is polite, if not a bit short. “I’m not certain what you remember of the last five days but you proved... *difficult*...to feed.”

Warmth rushes to Will’s cheeks with his blush and he ducks his head, taking a sip of his juice to avoid speaking for a moment. “I remember some,” he states, pushing at his eggs with his fork as that warmth floods down into his chest and belly. “Honeyed figs and sticky fingers...a bath…” his eyes dart up to Hannibal’s, then, and his breath catches at the inscrutable emotion he finds swirling there. He drops his gaze, shrugging a shoulder to appear casual. “Not much, really. I just know that I’ve never felt this refreshed after a heat before.”

Hannibal clears his throat, and in the peripherals of his vision Will can see him set down his fork. “There *is* something I wished to talk to you about. I had planned to find another time but I think that perhaps now is as good as ever.”

Will stares resolutely at his plate when Hannibal pauses for his consent to continue.

The man beside him gives a soft sigh, and Will’s mind races through his memories to determine if he’s ever heard such a sound come from the Alpha before. “I had thought, at the beginning of this, that we could enter into a platonic arrangement to see you safely through your heat.”

Oh, God, this is it. Hannibal feels awkward and unsure about what they did and doesn’t want to be friends anymore. It is a bit ironic that, of the two of them, *Will* is the one that feels able to carry forward without any doubts. Will knew this would happen, he *knew*, and yet he took the chance, risked the best friendship he’s ever had…

“It seems that I did not take into account how compatible we might have been,” Hannibal continues, unaware of the destructive tailspin of Will’s line of thought. “I apologize, Will. I know that I suggested this arrangement as a professional from a clinical standpoint, but I find all the same that I will not be satisfied unless I try. I would like to pursue a courtship with you.”

Will’s heart stops, something thick growing rapidly in his throat as he attempts to swallow. “You...want to…?”

“I want to court you,” Hannibal repeats.

Will is dumbstruck, finds that suddenly every spare brain cell he has is banding together so that his mouth does not gape open dumbly. He continues to stare at his plate. “I’m...I’m not like other Omegas. You won’t find a pliant housewife in me,” he warns softly. He startles slightly when Hannibal rests a hand on his shoulder, his gaze snapping back to the Alpha automatically.

“If that was what I was looking for I would have found myself mated and settled long before now, Will. I don’t expect you to give up the career you’ve pursued so ardently just because you find you want to share your life with someone.”

“I don’t want pups,” Will states firmly. “And that’s not an ‘oh, I’m just not ready to settle in for such a responsibility yet’, I mean that I truly do not wish to bring children into this world. This is not something I will change my mind about in a year or two. Hell, I’m not even sure if I’m fertile; never bothered to get tested.”

“I’ve hardly considered a mate for myself, in all my years. Children have never crossed my thoughts,” Hannibal assures him. “In any case, I’m only requesting to court you, Will. I’ve not set my hopes on placing a bond and moving you in quite yet.”

Will’s chest swells at the thought. No Alpha has ever deemed him worthy of courting (not that he’d ever come across an Alpha that he wished would). “I just want you to know what you’re getting into,” he mumbles, returning his attention to the eggs on his plate, rapidly growing cold.

“I’m well aware,” Hannibal responds. “And I thrill at the challenge. That is...if you consent?”

Will shrugs a shoulder, ducking his head to hide his face once more. “Go for it, I guess.” He can almost feel the tension melting from the Alpha next to him. “One condition,” he adds, glad that he’s thought to mention it. “No extravagant gifts.” Hannibal seems like the sort to shower his potential mate with all the finer things. And by the way he’s caught the doctor eyeing his scruffy jeans and faded flannel, Will can imagine where he would start. His eyes flit up to meet warm amber. “They make me uncomfortable,” he explains, and Hannibal nods.

“Fair enough.”

When Will has eaten enough to satisfy the ravenous hunger his heat has left him with, he returns to his room to fetch the fresh change of clothes and toothbrush he'd brought along. The room stinks of them, of sex. After five days it should smell stale and ripe but it has the opposite effect, flooding Will's mouth with saliva from a different sort of hunger, his cock twitching in interest.

"Enough of that," he mutters to himself, slipping into the en suite with his knapsack to refresh. A glance around shows only a shower in the guest bathroom, and Will notes with pleasure that Hannibal must have brought him into his private space to make use of the bathtub.

Will gives a small sigh, warmth flooding through him at the hazy memory. The bathtub, where Hannibal had washed his hair and scrubbed him clean with sure and tender hands. Where he had lain sprawled across a hard chest, enveloped in warm water and even warmer arms. Where he had murmured against impossibly soft lips that a claim had been laid to him, and Hannibal had agreed.

And now the Alpha wants to court him.

Will blinks back to reality, studies himself in the mirror above the sink. He looks remarkably well, for having just spent the last five days in heat--two days longer than he had ever experienced in the past. He looks as though he had gotten decent rest and nourishment, and his skin seems to glow from the satisfaction that still buzzes lightly through his core. Curiosity snags him and he peels apart the folds of the bathrobe to examine his torso. Despite his play talk earlier, it appears that Hannibal did not leave any lasting marks on Will. He's not sure if he feels respected or rejected by the lack of ownership.

On the whole, though, he looks and feels relaxed, content. Part of him wants to admonish himself for never seeking an Alpha out for his heat before now. A larger part of him knows that the effect was only had because the Alpha in question was Hannibal.

Hannibal, who wants to court him. *Him* .

Will brushes his teeth with a bit more force than necessary; changes into his fresh clothing and then prepares himself to depart.

They stand at the threshold, and it's somehow the most awkward moment of this whole experience; perhaps because neither one of them is happy to see this end but both refuse to state as much.

"I don't know how to thank you for all of this," Will begins hesitantly.

Ever the gracious host, Hannibal grants him a soft smile. "Your appreciation is thanks enough."

Will fidgets with the knapsack in his grasp, shuffles on his feet, ducks his head for a moment as a blush invades his cheeks and then moves before he can second-guess himself.

He steps forward, closing the distance between them to rest his hand on a solid chest and pressing forward place a chaste kiss to Hannibal's lips. Hannibal disarms him completely by moving himself, bringing a hand up to capture Will's chin before he can depart, tips it up slightly to encourage a deeper kiss, and then invades him.

It is the most intimate gesture that they have shared, with Will completely in his own mind, and he completely spirals from it. He gasps at Hannibal's bold gesture, lets out a soft whine when their tongues slide together. The action makes him feel wanted, special, emboldens and encourages him. And just as Will is about to push even closer, wrap his arms around the Alpha to hold them together, Hannibal pulls away.

"It was a pleasure to serve you, Will," Hannibal purrs smoothly. "I will see you on Thursday?" he asks, confirming their standing appointment. Thursday, unless we seek each other out sooner; the unspoken addendum.

Will nods, clamping down on his lips for a moment before allowing them to tug into a smile. "Thursday," he confirms.

Will had planned to keep his pack kenneled for another day after his heat ended to give him time to adjust, but he found when he left Hannibal's house that he had an abundance of energy buzzing under his skin and retrieved his pack a day early because of it.

They are happy to be home, as is Will, and though he feels well enough to return to his lectures the next day, he decides to take Alana up on her offer to stay through Tuesday. It would be good for his pack to have an extra few days with him, after being away for so long.

They get one day. By Monday evening, Jack is calling him. Will knows from the messages left on his phone in the last week that the BSU had begun analyzing the list compiled of Enoch Pratt staff and volunteers. He knows that if Jack is calling him, once again, it is important.

"We found him," Jack states as soon as Will answers. "Deputies started canvassing branches on Saturday, word got around pretty fast after that. Our man got spooked, took off."

Will doesn't respond, because he can already hear that there is more Jack isn't saying.

"...He grabbed a kid before he disappeared," Jack adds, as though this were not the entire reason for his call. "He's alive, he left him behind...but not before he bit him."

Will's blood runs cold at the thought of that deranged man's fangs sinking into another innocent neck. He wonders vaguely if it was more merciful or cruelty to allow the boy to live. His stomach sinks as his chest grows cold, the dreamy warmth his stay at Hannibal's had induced in him tainted by harsh reality. He has to see this boy, talk to him. He knows this as much as he knows that he doesn't want to.

"Where is he?"

He's fifteen minutes out from the hospital when the anxiety strikes. Will calls Hannibal because he is a respectable psychiatrist and is familiar with the case and is Will's only form of stability. The doctor agrees to meet Will there without a second thought. And that's surely only because it is convenient for the Alpha, because he has not yet slipped back into his normal routine due to his unpredictable commitment to Will.

Surely because of that, and not because Will is the one that asks. Surely.

When Will arrives, he can see through the small window on the door that the boy is awake but he waits to enter the room, static and anxious, for seventeen minutes until Hannibal arrives as well. He casts Will a supportive glance before they give a curt knock and open the door. Jack greets them immediately; a woman sitting next to the bed stands and strides over to them with purpose.

She is tall and slim, with a stern countenance, emphasized all the more by the severe bun that twists her blonde locks back tightly. "Gentlemen, a word outside, please?" it is a demand that is poorly disguised as a request, her tone brooking no arguments; all three men blink in surprise before acquiescing and stepping outside, closing the door behind them.

"I don't see why this is necessary," she's out of the gate before Will even realizes that the starting gun has sounded, his introduction dying on his lips. "My son has recounted this awful afternoon to half a dozen uniforms at least, as well as all of his doctors. What more do you people want from him?"

"As I explained, Ms. Simmons, Will Graham is the most talented investigator I have on my team. If there were any details missed, any at all, he would notice."

"You know who that monster is. Called him out to play without any plan to catch him and my son suffers for it. I wonder, then, why your 'most talented investigator' is at my son's bedside instead of on the chase. That prick is probably out of the state by now and you're all just *standing* here, forcing a twelve year old boy to relive his trauma!" she could really get going, when she got some steam, her tone flat and angry, her hard eyes daring Jack Crawford to interrupt.

"He hasn't left Baltimore," Will states quietly, before anyone else can speak. Ms. Simmons turns her steely gaze to him now, a thin eyebrow arching high as if she is surprised that he spoke out of turn. Will gets the feeling that the woman before him is accustomed to steamrolling others until she gets her way. "He won't leave. He can't. Not until he sees if the bond takes with your son."

"I beg your pardon?" she asks, but her icy hiss lends to a much less polite response. "My son is *twelve*. It's a slim enough chance that he'll even present as an Omega with his parentage, and even then not at *least* for three more years. There will be no *bonding*. It's impossible ."

"You know that, and we know that, but such facts do not matter to this killer," Hannibal steps in, much to Will's relief. "He is convinced that the only reason he has failed to enable a bond

thus far is because he's been picking the wrong boy. He doesn't see age or maturity or genetics. All he sees is a potential mate."

"He had selected him," Will takes over before the formidable Ms. Simmons can catch her breath to begin another round of beratement. "He knew we were coming for him and he panicked," Will's mouth turns sour as he speaks the words, remembering the last time a killer had known and panicked, remembering the two women that bled out in front of him that day. "He didn't have the time or resources to take him along so he did the only thing he could think of: he placed a bonding bite and left him behind. He won't go far. He will come back to see if it worked. He has to."

"Ms. Simmons, we understand that you are frustrated and upset," Jack cuts in. "But Will is right; Shane is still in danger until we catch this maniac. It's possible that Will could see something that the others didn't--that's what he does--but we won't know unless he talks to him."

It seems that the logic of the three of them combined is enough, and Will watches as the woman deflates before them. "He's all I have in this world. I need him safe." He's surprised that her voice cracks on the last word, the emotional toil of the day apparently finally catching up to her.

"Let Shane help us find him, and then he will be," Jack assures her.

The mother gives a reluctant nod, leads them back into her son's room.

Shane Simmons is a slight child to begin with, made all the more diminutive by the large, sterile hospital bed in which he resides. He is pale, uncertain and shaken, with a pad of gauze covering the left side of his neck and the beginnings of bruises blooming across his arms. As they enter, his dark eyes study the new faces with placid interest.

"Shane, this is Special Agent Will Graham, Dr. Hannibal Lecter," Jack introduces, nodding at them each in turn. "They would like to hear a bit more about what happened today, if you're up for it."

The boy nods slowly. "Mom, will you get me a Mountain Dew?"

Ms. Simmons looks torn between leaving her son and fulfilling his request. "I should be present while you're questioned, sweetie."

Shane rolls his eyes, clearly exasperated. "You've heard all this enough. Nothing's going to change. Please? I'm getting a caffeine headache." When his mother hesitates again, Shane tosses a pleading look to Jack.

"I'll walk to you the machines," Jack offers. "I could use a coffee myself." He guides the mother out and the door swings shut, leaving the three of them in silence.

There is only one seat at the bedside which Hannibal takes, curling his long form in to appear smaller and less threatening to the traumatized boy. Will stands beside him, feeling as

inappropriate and out of place as he always has in these situations; it is very seldom indeed that one of Will's cases includes a living victim.

"I've read about you online," Shane speaks suddenly, staring at Will. "Freddie Lounds says you're just as crazy as the killers you hunt."

Will fights down the instinctive snarl that threatens to curl his lips at the woman's name. "Freddie Lounds says a lot of things," he rejoins gruffly. "You're too young to be reading her garbage anyways."

"Her garbage saved my life," the boy shoots back, and Hannibal lets out a small, curious sound as Will stares on dumbly. "I read about him. About how he was looking for a mate. About what happened to the boys he took before me," his eyes darken as an involuntary shiver flits down his spine. "He was going to take me. I knew what would happen if he did."

"What are you saying, Shane?" Hannibal asks, lucky for Will, as his own tongue is glued uselessly to the roof of his mouth.

"I told him I remembered him from the library--that much was true; he was always helping at the reference desk. I told him I felt drawn to him too, like we were supposed to be together."

Will can feel something heavy like disgust settle in his gut while shock at this turn of events has his heart hammering. It's a crazy thing to consider but...did this twelve year old boy manipulate a known serial killer? Outsmart him?

"I told him I couldn't leave with him yet, because it wasn't safe for us if we were caught together. So I asked him to bite me...so he would know. That I was his. That it was okay to leave me for a bit because he could come back and then..." The callous indignation that had colored the boy's tone falters, his voice cracks. He brings a hand up to ghost lightly over the patch on his neck. "It *hurt*," he says softly, sounding for the first time like a scared twelve year old.

"This is not the story you have told the others," Hannibal points out, and Will knows just as he does that this is true without needing to read the reports of the other officers. The reason that he wanted his mother and Jack out of the room. Curious that he didn't mind Hannibal staying in with them.

Shane doesn't reply to that, takes a deep breath and blinks, tamping down the emotions that have risen in him. When he looks at Will again, the little boy is gone. "He promised me he would stay close, until it's safe to get me. There's a vacant building half a block over from the library in Waverly--that's the one I'd seen him at. It was near my school, I was supposed to go there every day to wait until my mom could pick me up after work at six. She didn't want me home alone," he gives a soft huff. "Not safe to be home alone."

"Supposed to?" Will prompts, eyes flicking instinctively to the door. It's unlikely that they have much more time to speak candidly.

"The library has an after school program, though really once you get in you're on your own anyways. If you don't sign in by a certain time they contact your listed guardian. Then you

get checked out when your guardian picks you up. I met some boys that knew a way to sneak out after we signed in. They showed me this old store that has been shut down forever, how to get in. The place is mostly empty, but we could be loud there at least. I think he knows about it. I was on my way back to the library when he grabbed me in the alley."

"Your friends weren't with you?" Will asks, filing away this new information.

"I left before them. They were smoking. My mom would kill me if she smelled cigarettes on me, so I decided not to risk it and head back early," the boy scoffs. "Course then I had to explain what I was doing in some alley instead sitting in the library doing my homework. *That* went over well."

"You--" Will freezes instinctively as he hears voices sound outside the door. *Damn*.

Hannibal stands swiftly and excuses himself, brushing past Will on his way to the door. He closes it behind himself deftly as he slips into the hallway. Will waits a moment more, but it seems Hannibal is running a successful interference for the time being. He steps closer to the boy and lowers his voice.

"You still haven't explained why you haven't told anyone else this. The other officers, Jack."

"Freddie Lounds says you're a killer," Shane states. Will can't help but wince at the blunt statement. *Freddie Lounds isn't wrong,* he wants to say. "You killed that Shrike guy. This guy is a total freak. He killed those boys. Raped them too. I know he did, even if the news won't say it. He wanted me next. He thinks...if he goes to prison he'll always think I'm his. I don't want him in prison. I want him to die for what he did."

Will stares at the boy before him, only slightly disconcerted by the way part of him wants to let out a purr. Shane Simmons wants him to enact vigilante justice on his behalf; Will doesn't hate the idea. He's at a complete loss as to how to respond. "Are you sure you're twelve?"

The boy's lips quirk up into a small smile, and with the action Will can see the small spark of darkness flare within cold eyes--a darkness with which he himself is intimately familiar. "I'm thirteen next month."

Hannibal is still explaining the benefits of therapy for Shane when Will emerges from the room. Jack pulls him aside, apparently content to discontinue feigning interest in the ongoing conversation.

"Anything?"

Will purses his lips. "It's much the same as he's told everyone else, I'm sure, but I'm still processing. It'll take time for me to work through it, discover any follow-up questions that may arise. In the meantime I need everything you have on this…"

"Emmett Wilcox," Jack provides. "The file is in my car."

They return to Ms. Simmons and Hannibal, thanking her again for her time and cooperation before parting ways; Will follows Jack to his car to retrieve the file.

He watches as Jack pulls away before he turns back to where his own car is parked in the ramp, clutching the file in one hand as he pulls out his phone with the other.

“Can I come over?”

The file is spread out across the elegant maple dining table--what little of it there is, at least. No priors, no shady connections. Nothing to indicate that one day, seemingly out of nowhere, Emmett Wilcox would just begin raping and killing preteen boys.

Will spends some time staring at the enlarged DMV picture of the Beta. ‘Generic’ is the first word Will would pick to describe the man which, being a Beta, wasn’t unusual. Forty-one, single, lackluster brown hair (complete with receding hairline) and equally lackluster brown eyes. Average nose, weak chin and jawline, full cheeks and a neck thick enough to indicate that he’s been less than proactive at maintaining his youthful figure; nothing about the man screams unique or desirable.

Hannibal is still studying what little information they have. Will moves on to pacing about the room.

“You haven’t told me what Shane said to you when I left the room,” Hannibal points out, his eyes never leaving the pages before him. Will wonders how long he’s been waiting to ask.

He considers, briefly, pussy-footing around the subject. If he doesn’t say it out loud then they don’t have to discuss it, and Will doesn’t have to admit… There’s no getting around it, though, so he pauses in his pacing, stares resolutely at *Leda and the Swan,* presented over the mantle, rather than turning around to face Hannibal, takes a deep breath.

“Shane wants me to kill Wilcox.”

He’s not sure how he feels about Hannibal’s lack of reaction. A long, silent minute stretches between them. Then, the rustle of paper being laid down, the soft sound of the dining chair being pushed back. He doesn’t hear Hannibal’s footsteps as he approaches him around the table, but Will can feel when he’s near, can feel the heat radiating from him, the soft puffs of his breath caressing the nape of Will’s neck.

“A curious boy,” Hannibal notes, and Will nods. “Clever, to manipulate the situation to his advantage.”

“He *bit* him,” Will ground out, and the thought of it again lays heavy and sick in his stomach.

“At Shane’s insistence, apparently.”

“A mark that he could bear for the rest of his life.”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal agrees. He lays a hand on Will’s shoulder and it’s solid and comforting and grounding. “All the same, he’ll have the rest of his life.”

Will tilts back slightly, just enough to make contact with Hannibal. The rest of him is equally solid and grounding. He can feel Hannibal tilt his head down, can feel his lips ghost across the back of his neck. His other hand slides up to rest on Will’s hip. It should bother him that the Alpha is so familiar, so forward. It doesn’t. Instead, it sends thrill after buzzing thrill shooting through his body. Hannibal--proper, polite, reserved *Hannibal* --is showing him affection, and he never wants it to stop. The doctor’s breath is steady and even against Will’s skin, warming different spots as he leans closer still to nuzzle into the curls near his scent gland, tilts his head to rest his mouth against the shell of Will’s ear.

“Do you want to?” the words come on a single breath, the hand at his right shoulder slides down his arm to spread across his hip on that side as well.

Will freezes; his own breaths are shallow, his heart thumping in his ears. He’s already admitted to Hannibal that he enjoyed killing Hobbs. He recalls the distinct lack of judgement he had felt from the Alpha then. But Hobbs had been reactionary. This was something altogether different. This was premeditation.

Yes, yes, he wants to say. *I want to make him pay for every minute of pain he made those boys suffer through.*

Will takes a slow, deep breath, feels his body relax further against Hannibal as he releases it. “I--”

On the table, his phone begins to buzz. Will startles out of Hannibal’s loose grasp at the sound. He steps away to retrieve it, rattling across the wood with its vibrations. It’s Alana. “I should take this,” he mutters, excuses himself from the room without looking toward Hannibal.

“Alana. Hi,” he greets as he steps into Hannibal’s study. “How did everything go?”

“Couldn’t have gone smoother. Your lectures and lesson plans are remarkably detailed. Didn’t leave much guess work. How are *you* doing?”

“I’m good. Great, actually, considering it was my first one in a decade.”

“Must have been intense. Did you end up going to a heat clinic then?”

Will rubs the back of his neck with his free hand. “Yeah.” *With attending heat specialist Dr. Hannibal Lecter.* “They, uh. They took good care of me.”

He can hear the smile in her voice. Sweet Alana. “I’m glad. I’ve known a few Omegas who have had less than stellar experiences with clinics, so that’s good. Listen, I don’t have long to chat--I’m on my way to dinner with Margot--but I just wanted to let you know that I left the tests from this afternoon in your office. Sorry, I would have corrected them as well but I didn’t have the answer key--”

“I’ve got it at home. It’s no problem. Thank you, Alana. Seriously. I owe you lunch.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” she warns, bids him farewell.

He finds Hannibal in the kitchen, because of course he does, and he seems to be rummaging through his fridge, pulling out this or that to throw a dinner together for them, because of course he is.

“I realize the hour is growing late, but I do hope you’ll stay for dinner before heading back to Wolf Trap,” Hannibal scarcely glances at him as he moves to the stove to begin heating a frying pan.

Hannibal wants him to stay for dinner. It is likely less about feeding him and more about finding their way back to the topic that had been interrupted.

Will considers saying no, remembers that his kitchen is essentially barren after spending a week away from home. It was a terrible idea not to hit the grocery store on the way home from Baltimore. He considers saying no, remembers that Hannibal has asked to court him, considers him a potential mate, and deserves to know what he would be bonded to, should things progress that way.

Will agrees to stay for dinner.

Hannibal must sense his hesitation, because the topic doesn’t come up again. They make what equates to small talk through dinner, avoiding the case and all things related to it with a wide berth. And even though the subject wasn’t broached, nor the question repeated, for the entire drive home Will can’t shake the feeling that he lied to Hannibal.

He releases his pack and gets their dinner dished out; stares at his phone. He pours himself a few fingers of whiskey and moves out to sit on the porch and watch the dogs, what little he can see of them from the light of the house. Out towards the treeline they are little more than slightly darker blurs against the dark, doing their business and romping about to burn off the energy of being trapped inside all evening. He stares at his phone.

When the two fingers of whiskey have been reduced to a few lingering droplets, Will sighs and dials.

“Will. Did you get home alright?”

Of course Hannibal would be concerned that he was calling at this hour, having had just left his company. Will curses himself for not considering this. He should have waited until… Until when? Until the morning, when they would both have a full day of work ahead of them to concentrate on? Until the topic comes up again, if it ever does? Until this courtship has progressed far enough that Hannibal feels trapped with him, despite finding out what Will is, what he is capable of?

“I did,” he responds, taking a deep breath and staring longingly at his empty tumbler. “And...I do. Want to. I want him to pay, Hannibal. I want this asshole dead. More than that...I want to kill him.”

Silence meets his declaration and Will forgets to breathe for what feels like a full minute. He pulls his phone back to glance at the screen to ensure the call hasn’t dropped.

“Will you tell Jack?”

“No, Will. I won’t tell Jack.” Hannibal’s voice feels like a balm, soothing his mind and soul that have grown hot with anxiety.

Another moment of silence. Will considers moving back inside to refill his glass; he’s getting chilly out here without his jacket anyways.

“Do...do you still want to court me?” he asks, considers adding that there’s no hard feelings if the answer is no, that he understands why Hannibal wouldn’t want to. He’s an oddity enough, for his gender especially, but to add murderous desires...Will could see how it would be a deal-breaker.

He’s surprised by the soft chuckle that rings through his phone. “Yes, Will. I very much do. If you are still amenable…?”

“I am,” Will answers, a little too quickly to not feel embarrassed about. He clears his throat. “I’m amenable.”

“Wonderful. Perhaps we should table the other part of this discussion for another time, yes? I have extended my hours for the next few days for my rescheduled patients. I’m afraid I won’t be available for dinner until Thursday.”

Will can’t help but grin, his mind still spinning and his heart light. “7:30?”

Chapter End Notes

I have probably made this clear enough in this chapter but I just want to reiterate:

Will and Hannibal's meeting and initial relationship is canon with the show. The only thing that I have altered is that Abigail died along with her mother that day. I have nothing against Abigail as a character but I'm not really sure how to write her and she just doesn't have a place in this story.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Hannibal gives Will a present; Will has mixed feelings about it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

From the moment they met, Hannibal has had a theory about Will Graham. He has always been certain that within the man lurks the dark shadow of a caged beast prowling, much like his own. With every interaction, every conversation, every new bit of information he has gleaned from the profiler, he has grown more confident in his hypothesis. He is able to adapt to the mind of a killer far too easily to simply blame it on his, albeit intriguing, empathy. His knee-jerk instinct to put ten bullets in Garrett Jacob Hobbs was proof enough of that, the subsequent conversation in which he admitted to enjoying the act proof even further.

There has also always resided something else in Will Graham--a misplaced sense of morality, built from the social constructs of the uninspired that have always surrounded him, perhaps--that has elicited the compulsive need to desperately smother and bury that predisposition for violence.

Hannibal would see the Omega free of such constraints; would relish the sight of the man bathed in the blood of another with satisfaction, rather than abject horror, blanketed across his beautiful features.

He has suspected for quite some time that his imago of Will would only be realized when he could find a way to manipulate events *just so*…

And then this killer, and that phone call.

And then Will Graham, in the breath of a sentence, turned every assumption of Hannibal's on its head and gave him a glimmering visage of hope for a simpler path.

His darling Omega wants to kill Emmett Wilcox--the Suitor, as Freddie Lounds has taken to calling him (after a helpful, anonymous tip pointed out the flaws of her previously chosen moniker for the killer). He senses much potential in this situation and he *will* see it realized; of that he is determined. To do so, this Suitor must be found, taken. It will take time.

For now, Hannibal is struck almost giddy with inspiration, his body aching to move and his blood singing for blood.

He visits his rolodex.

He was truthful to Will in their previous conversation: he is quite busy with an overflow of rescheduled patients that week. He can't research or work as quickly as he would like. It takes the better part of three nights what he could normally accomplish in one, but he is satisfied with the end result all the same.

As it is, Will should discover his gift sometime throughout the day. His reaction toward it should still be fresh by the time they meet that evening for dinner.

The anticipation spiking through him makes the day feel all that much longer.

Will is surprised, though he shouldn't be by this point, when Jack strides into his classroom practically *bleeding* authority. The Alpha flips the lights on as he enters, effectively rendering Will's slideshow useless.

"Class dismissed," he barks, and the trainees, more than familiar with the seething Alpha before them, scatter without question.

Will wants to be annoyed, wants to point out how rude it is to not only interrupt his teaching but also the students' education. But all he can think about is that Wilcox must have gotten his hands on Shane Simmons, or another boy perhaps. He's completely blindsided by what falls from Jack's mouth next.

"Our old friend the Ripper has decided to make a reappearance," he explains, jerking his head for Will to follow; Will does, without question, not bothering to gather his things or even shut off the projector on their way out the door.

"You've seen the scene?"

"Not yet," Jack admits, "but our dream team is there. They are sure it's him. From what they've described, I agree."

The dream team: Jack's little nickname for Price, Zeller and Katz. "They've seen enough of the Ripper's work to know it when they see it," Will agrees. The Chesapeake Ripper, active *now*? Why?

Will scoffs internally at his own question. Why does the Ripper ever do what he does, when he does it? It suits him. He must be bored. Perhaps he is annoyed that the Suitor--Wilcox, Will corrects in his mind, because he hates using monikers that Freddie Lounds makes up whenever he can help it--has been getting so much attention lately. After all, Wilcox is a brute, his drive to kill far more base in nature; no artistry at all. The Ripper wouldn't respect someone so inelegant. Will imagines there are far few people, if any, whom the Ripper truly respects.

It's only a thirty minute drive from the Academy to the national park where the tableau has been set. They don't even have to hike that far in to the scene. The Ripper must have been

pressed for time--he usually picks at least *slightly* more discreet places for his displays. And so close to Quantico...it's almost as if he's thumbing his nose at them.

The dream team is still there, collecting what information they can without disturbing the scene; it's long since been ingrained in everyone that Will needs the presentation intact for maximum efficiency. As ever, they clear out of the way when his presence is heralded by Jack's heavy footfalls.

At almost first glance he can tell it's the Ripper, or at the very least make a reasonable assumption. The precise and deliberate positions of the bodies is a dead giveaway, as are the abdominal and chests cavities that have been ripped open. Will tilts his head, steps closer to take in the details, accepting a pair of latex gloves from Katz as he passes by with a silent nod of thanks.

The victims are both male, one Alpha, one Omega, both unbonded. The Omega has been propped into a standing position, and while his chest cavity has been cracked open it appears that none of the organs within have been disturbed, with the exception of the red daisies and variegated tulips that have been carefully tucked between them.

The Alpha kneels at the Omega's feet, his head tilted to show his neck in blatant submission. His abdomen has been opened, same as the Omega, the difference, of course, lying in the fact that his own torso has been completely cleared of organs. Instead, it is overflowing with blossoms; purple bellflower and orange tulips. The only organ of the Alpha's that remains is his heart, grasped in his hand and held out in supplication toward the Omega. His other hand is reaching up toward the Omega's chest; his heart seems the likely target.

He contemplates the blossoms, pulls out his phone--thankful for the good reception--and does a quick search online. Bellflower to symbolize unwavering love, orange tulips for understanding and appreciation, red daisies for beauty unknown to the possessor, variegated tulips for beautiful eyes.

You've the most stunning eyes, darling. Like the sea after a storm.

The words tear through his mind without warning; a hazy memory floating to the surface.

Will shakes them off with a frown; now is not the time for heat memories. He closes his eyes, however useless he thinks it may be. In times past, all he's been able to glean from the Ripper's mind is that he thinks of his victims no better than pigs, that they repulse him, that what he does to them is a humiliation and elevation all in one. He's surprised, then, to find that today paints a different picture.

I am a hollow shell without you. I offer all that I have: my heart, my neck, my love. All I crave in return is your own heart. Your love. You, beautiful Omega, so entirely perfect in your existence that any Alpha should fall to his knees and plead for your attention.

I give all that I have. All that I am. Let me have your heart.

Will's own heart is racing when he opens his eyes. He feels compelled to reach out and stroke the Alpha's proffered heart but realizes with surprise that his hands are shaking. He shoves

them into the pockets of his coat to keep them from view. A shiver snaps down his spine, but he grits his teeth and wills his muscles not to twitch in response.

Well. It seems as though the Chesapeake Ripper is courting someone.

The thought gives him pause. The Ripper...is *courting* someone? An Omega, by the looks of it. Something nags at the back of his mind and it takes a moment before he can make the question form. Aren't they…?

He pulls out his phone once more, opens his Maps application. Yes, they are. Right in the heart of Prince William Forest Park.

Oh, goddamnit.

Hannibal.

It makes so much sense that he's almost disgusted with himself for not seeing it sooner. He's literally a damn carbon copy of Will's profile for the Ripper, right down to being a pathologically charming shit.

Christ on a cracker.

Will wants to laugh. Desperately. His whole body shakes with it; he bites down hard on his tongue to stay silent. When he's gained some semblance of control over himself he turns back to Jack.

"Definitely the Ripper. Can't place the scene. In many of his displays he references classical literature and art, though sometimes he seems to work off of his own twisted sense of humor," Will can't help but think of the man in the church pew with his tongue acting as place marker in his bible; he's always found that one morbidly humorous. "Whatever this is…" he gives a shrug. "It may be less about the message and more about the fact that he wants to make sure we haven't forgotten about him. Serial killers don't generally take well to sharing the spotlight, and the Suitor has done more than a little to capture our full attention lately."

"So we have a pissing contest amongst serial killers then. That's just great."

Will wants to point out that technically there's no pissing contest because what Wilcox is doing isn't for attention but his own personal gain. There is also no contest because one simply cannot compete with the Chesapeake Ripper; he is a breed of killer all his own, ruthless and terrifying and beautiful. He decides to let it lie. Better that Jack focuses on that train of thought than glean the true message of the tableau.

"The Ripper's not going anywhere," Will points out. "He may have started another sounder but it tells us little of where or whom he may strike next, as always. We should keep our focus on Wilcox. Keep our protection on Shane Simmons. He'll try to make contact, eventually. It's been several days already since the bite; he'll be anxious to get close and see if a bond has formed."

Jack nods, turns back to the rest of the team, hovering on the sidelines. “Finish your pictures and then take it down, get the bodies to the BAU. Let me know when the results come in.”

They may as well have come in already, Will wants to say. *You’ll find the same thing you do with all of the Ripper’s victims: nothing.*

As they had agreed previously, that Thursday evening finds Will at Hannibal’s doorstep rather than his office waiting room. He is just this side of acceptably early, smartly dressed in charcoal grey slacks and a cobalt blue button-down (all the better to accent his eyes; since that afternoon he finds that he has very distinct memories of Hannibal speaking of his eyes during his heat), and this time he has brought a bottle of wine with him (an amarone that, he was assured by the sommelier, would pair wonderfully with just about any offal served).

Hannibal greets him warmly, accepts the bottle with gratitude and pleasure. “This will pair perfectly with our dinner this evening; let’s get it into a decanter, yes?” He beckons Will to follow him to the kitchen and Will does, watching passively as Hannibal opens the bottle and pours it into some contraption that will aerate the wine more quickly.

Hannibal must pick up on the tension that coils tightly in Will, though he’s trying desperately to play it down. It’s obvious Hannibal left him that scene. It’s less obvious if he expects Will to understand as much as he does now.

“How was your day, Will?” he feigns activity, checking on something in the oven of which he surely already knows the status.

Will drifts languidly around the island to where Hannibal stands. He keeps telling himself he should be upset--shit, he’s been trying to get upset about this for the better part of the afternoon--but every argument, every accusation his mind pulls forward is decidedly drowned out with a resounding, needy cry of *Alpha*. *My Alpha* hunted for me. *My Alpha* left me this gift.

“I’m a bit irritated with you,” he admits, because even if he can’t make himself feel angry about it, Hannibal should still know that appreciation is the last thing he should be expecting from Will. He herds Hannibal toward the edge of the counter, places his hands on either side of his long body to box him in. “To be quite honest.”

“I’m very sorry to hear that,” Hannibal responds, tilting his head in the way he does when he finds something curious. “May I ask what I have done to offend you?”

“I asked for one thing when you requested to court me. Just one. No extravagant gifts,” Will points out.

“I remember.”

“And yet…” Will gives an amused huff, can’t help but drop his head to Hannibal’s shoulder to steal a breath of his scent for strength. “And *yet*, I get called to a scene today. A Ripper scene. Wherein I nearly swallowed my tongue frantically spouting out some bullshit for Jack

about attention and dominance before he could recognize what it really was," he pulls his head back to peer up into Hannibal's eyes; the doctor looks an intriguing combination of surprised, elated and guarded. "What *I* know it was."

All at once, Hannibal's expression is schooled into that of vague interest; he brings a hand up to stroke gently along the stubble of Will's jaw. "And what was it?"

"Prince William Forest Park, Hannibal?" Will asks wryly with a quirked brow, rather than answer the question. "Pretty brazen. And a little on the nose for the Chesapeake Ripper. You're usually more subtle than this...in your own theatrical way." Even as he berates the Alpha he's turning his face to nuzzle into the warm hand on his jaw. "I should be sick with fury and disgust. At the *very* least I should be surprised. But I'm not." His hands slip from the counter to Hannibal's hips, solid and sharp under his wool pants, and he leans forward to erase the scant space that still separates their bodies. He tilts his face from Hannibal's grasp to nose along the column of his neck, nuzzling closer yet to fill his lungs with the Alpha's scent, not bothering with hiding the action this time.

This Alpha that has butchered and made art of numerous people, has likely fed more than a few of them to Will himself. This Alpha that could turn dangerous in a second, could kill Will now, if the mood struck him. And he wants *Will*. He knows it's base and primitive, but there's a substantial portion of the Omega that preens at this, that excites at the thought of having such a formidable Alpha to protect him. To call his own. He feels a soft purr rumble deeply in his chest, so soft that Hannibal may not hear it, but he can no doubt feel it with the way they are pressed together; just as Will can feel the heart beating hard beneath the breast of Hannibal's bespoke suit.

Hannibal's own hands have fallen to Will's shoulders, firm and gentle all at once, holding him close but not forcing him to stay. "What are you, then, if none of those?" He speaks with intention, neither spouting out denials to shoot down Will's claim nor making any statement of admittance.

Will exhales a breathy laugh into Hannibal's skin, dragging his lips along a clean-shaven jaw to murmur against his mouth. "Relieved."

Hannibal allows the soft kiss, returns it, runs his hands down Will's arms to lace their hands together. "Is that right?"

"Humorous, to think that I was so worried about my own dark thoughts and fantasies pushing you away. You may be the only person that truly understands me, Hannibal Lecter."

Hannibal's answering smile steals his breath. "In that, Will Graham, I believe we are perfectly matched."

Their lips meet once more, just as the timer on the oven sounds, and they both part from each other with equal hums of frustration. Hannibal moves to attend to the oven while Will leans back against the counter.

"What's for dinner?" he asks, wonders if it would be more appropriate to say 'who'.

“Steak and kidney pie,” Hannibal responds, and Will can’t help the laugh that is torn from his throat.

“Guess the amarone was a good bet, then. I can probably source the kidney, given the hollowed out Alpha I was faced with today. Tell me about this ‘steak’.”

Hannibal flashes him a toothy grin as he plates each of the small pies. “It’s steak,” he assures Will, deliberately ignoring the first half of his statement. Will bites his lip to stop his frown from forming. There is an undeniable attraction between them, as well as an unmistakable like-mindedness. All the same, Hannibal must not quite trust him yet. He has done little more than skirt or entirely ignore any of Will’s words that would be damning for him to acknowledge.

He can’t be offended--he understands entirely; remembers the moment of clawing panic he felt when he told Hannibal that he wished to kill Wilcox and was met with only silence. Still, he wants to court Will, can picture a future for them. He must trust him, on some level. Hannibal doesn’t seem the sort to surrender to uncertain hopes.

“They’ll need to rest for a moment. Shall we begin with the salads?” Hannibal suggests, picking up their plates, and Will grabs the decanter of wine, following him out to the dining room.

Will pours them each a generous glass and they settle in, tucking into their salads--which are more roasted beets and carrots with a bit of greens mixed about--in silence.

Will pauses after a single bite. “There’s whiskey in this salad,” he notes.

Hannibal rewards him with a small smile. “Your palate is expanding,” he states with no small amount of smugness; Will knows that it has been Hannibal’s goal to tutor Will in fine cuisine since the first time the doctor heard him utter the word ‘McDonald’s’.

Will shoots him a wry smirk in response. “My palate is more than familiar with the taste of whiskey. It’s not too difficult to pick out.”

“Tell me, Will, what else do you taste?”

Will takes another bite and chews slowly, considering. He’d have kept his mouth shut altogether if he’d known he was going to end up being tested. “Honey,” he notes, and Hannibal makes a small sound of approval. “Mustard. Something nutty…” he scowls at Hannibal’s raised brow, “*besides* the walnuts. Sunflower oil?”

Hannibal beams at him. “Well done, Will.”

Will heats at the praise.

When they’ve cleaned their plates, Hannibal removes them to the kitchen and returns with two small dishes, each baring one beautifully golden pie.

“Steak and kidney pie,” Hannibal announces as he sets Will’s plate before him, “with onions, carrots and rich beef gravy.”

Will picks up his fork and pauses, considers the small pie on his plate. He's known (or at least was fairly certain) for some time now that the Chesapeake Ripper was eating the organs he harvested. At the scene earlier, when it became so blatantly clear that it was Hannibal--had always been Hannibal--he had reconciled with disturbing ease the fact that he'd likely been served Hannibal's kills. The man did have a penchant for offal. In fact, the thing that had upset him the most about the whole situation was that he was blind-sided with the display and subsequent knowledge in front of Jack and the others, being forced to expend considerable effort to mask his emotions.

This moment, though, somehow feels big; the first time he eats at Hannibal's table knowing where the meat comes from. Curious that the thought still doesn't disgust him. Quite the opposite, actually. It's another one of those thoughts that has Will's primitive Omega side thrilled at the concept. Hannibal hunted this, prepared it, and wishes to share it with his mate.

Potential, Will stresses. *Potential mate. We're hardly bonded yet.*

Yet. It feels almost like an inevitability between them. The more Will discovers about Hannibal the more fitting a mate he seems to become.

We could make each other happy.

He can feel Hannibal's gaze on him, snaps himself out of his reverie to break into his pie with the edge of his fork and gather a bite of meat and crust, raising it to his mouth with no more hesitation. The crust is perfectly crisp, flaky, the gravy thick and rich. He's speared a bite of steak--Hannibal wasn't lying about that, if he concentrates on the flavor Will can tell that it's beef--and a bit of kidney as well. He chews through thoughtfully, can taste the underlying strike of iron through the salt and gravy.

His eyes dart up to meet Hannibal's, flashes the man a smile. "Delicious, as always."

Hannibal doesn't hide his pleasure at the pronouncement, cutting into his own pie with his eyes lowered and a small smile twisting his lips. "You are taking to this new information remarkably well, Will--or is it new? How long have you known?" Hannibal asks after he takes a sip of wine.

Will is delighted that he seems to have decided to drop the charade. "Longer than I've realized, I think," he answers honestly. "My profile for the Ripper has always been at the back of my mind. It's laughable to realize now how spot on I was," he grins at Hannibal over his wine glass, takes a sip. The sommelier was right in his suggestion; the wine seems to enhance the savory meal in ways Will can't even describe. "Perhaps I always saw something in you...But it was this afternoon at the park when I fully embraced it. On that note," he sets his glass down and folds his hands before his plate, leveling Hannibal with an even gaze. "If you'd be so kind as to follow my guidelines in the future. I can read a scene of the Ripper's no problem, but I'm not sure what might fall out of my mouth in front of Jack if I'm faced with another of your...romantic overtures."

Hannibal nods in agreement, that small smile seemingly glued to his face. "No more courting displays. Noted."

“Thank you,” Will nods back, retrieves his fork. He stabs another bite, pauses before bringing it to his mouth, eyeing Hannibal once more. “That’s not to say I didn’t appreciate the gesture. It *was* beautiful. I suppose I don’t have to ask if you meant it.”

Hannibal reaches across the table to cover Will’s empty hand. His gaze is as intense as ever, eyes focused and burning into Will’s, as if to force the truth of it into him. “I did. Truly.” He gives Will’s hand a slight squeeze, retracts his own and returns to his meal.

Will believes him. Something hot and unnamable, close to desire he thinks, spreads through his veins, warming him from within. His fingers twitch with the instinct to reach back out across the table, to join their flesh once more. Will places his hand in his lap and takes another bite of pie.

They eat in silence for a moment, a silence which is heavy but not altogether uncomfortable. More...expectant. Will feels his heart beat faster with each new bit of plate that lays bare before him.

“You make this discovery...you claim that you are relieved,” Hannibal finally speaks. “I must say, Will, you are an incredibly alluring and entirely unpredictable creature.”

“I don’t know about that,” Will can feel a blush heat his cheeks at the comment, ducks his head. “Though I do endeavor to exude a certain level of mystery,” he jests.

“Well, clearly my extracurricular activities don’t disturb you,” Hannibal states. “More interestingly, it seems I can say the same about my choice in fare.”

Will sets down his fork, waving a hand toward his empty plate as he retrieves his glass. “You always said you were eager to broaden my pitiful palate. I am assuming this is not the first time you’ve done so?” he waits as Hannibal shakes his head. “I’ve never had any complaints about the cuisine before; why start now?” He drains the remainder of his wine, licking his lips thoughtfully as he gazes at the Alpha. “I think I could become accustomed to a mate that hunts for me.”

Across the table, Hannibal lets out a purr that is both pleased and predatory, and the sound shoots straight through Will; desire coils hot in his belly, arousal making his head hazy and his skin buzz. He wants to circle the table and place himself in Hannibal’s lap, curl around him and feel his heat, breathe his scent--

“I have dessert,” Hannibal states, though he doesn’t sound excited in the least at the prospect.

Will licks his lips, gone impossibly dry, shifts in his chair as he can feel the beginnings of slick slip from his hole; Hannibal’s nostrils flare immediately in reaction, his eyes darkening. This is ridiculous. He can’t possibly spend another twenty minutes not wrapped around the Alpha before him.

“Will it keep?” Will asks, standing from his seat. The change in position only makes his arousal that much more evident, his cock beginning to thicken and strain against his slacks.

Hannibal mirrors his movement and Will is delighted to see that he is similarly affected; there's an anticipatory tension coiled in his shoulders, his cheeks darkened from flush. A fleeting thought flickers through Will's mind that if he were to run right now, Hannibal would merrily give chase. The notion is doing nothing to quell his arousal.

"Yes," he responds as Will circles the table to draw closer to him, takes a few steps himself to close the distance more quickly. "There's no rush."

Will slips his hands up to Hannibal's shoulders, pressing close to feel the warmth radiating from his body. Hannibal's hands grasp Will's waist as their lips meet, a groan pulled from them both as lips part and tongues seek. "Is it too presumptuous of me to ask you to take me upstairs, then?" Will pants between kisses; Hannibal's grip on him tightens.

"Not in the least." It's growled against his mouth, hands leaving hips to catch his own, pulling him along. Hannibal leads Will upstairs, past the door to the spare room and straight to his own. Will lets out a soft moan when he enters the room and finds himself completely surrounded by the Alpha's scent.

Hannibal has him up against the door as soon as it closes behind them and Will falls lax against it when his attentions move to Will's neck, fingers dancing up to work at the buttons on his shirt. Will can only focus on not melting to the floor, locking his knees and grasping the door behind him as Hannibal works.

"This color is lovely on you," Hannibal breathes against Will's skin and Will's nerves thrill with the praise. He whimpers and arches his neck to allow better access, knows how brazen of an action it is; trusting Hannibal not to take advantage, wishing that he would all the same. He comes back to himself when the cool air meets his burning skin as his shirt is shed, and he brings his own trembling hands up to work at loosening Hannibal's tie.

"I feel like a different person," he pants after Hannibal's lathing tongue across his pulse point draws out a particularly wanton moan. "I've never...I'm not…" Words leave him, replaced by a needy whimper, as the doctor's hands drift south, one to work at his belt and the other palming roughly at the hardness trapped by the confines of his pants.

Hannibal captures his mouth, breaks apart only far enough to breathe against his lips. "You're allowing your instincts to rule you for the first time in a decade, Will. Curious that they've led you straight to me."

Will huffs against him, finally regaining control over his fingers to peel away Hannibal's jacket and waistcoat. "Not really," he pushes back against Hannibal, stepping forward as his slacks drop to the ground to step out of them smoothly. Hannibal, having a head start on him, is still wearing entirely too much clothing. He has mercy on Will and begins with his own trousers as Will works at the buttons on his shirt. "We're just alike. Didn't you say that before?" he presses his mouth to Hannibal's before the man has a chance to answer, continues to guide him backwards towards the bed.

The rush of confidence he feels is intoxicating, addictive. He knows that most Omegas would become pliant at this point; accept the touch of their Alpha while too overstimulated to return it, would fall into the classic, submissive pose to present for mounting. Will's claws dig into

Hannibal's sides at the thought. He is not most Omegas; a fact that has kept him self-conscious and self-isolated for a large portion of his life. He is freed by the knowledge that Hannibal does not want most Omegas; he wants Will, just as he is. He is thrilled to find that Hannibal is content with Will taking control, moves where Will guides him without question to sit on the bed with his back against the headboard.

Will climbs over him, swinging one leg over Hannibal's hips fluidly to straddle; he is warm and solid beneath him and Will squirms against him for a moment, enjoying the sensation before arching back and grasping Hannibal's length.

Hannibal's hands grip his hips, stilling him as he rises to mount. "Let me prepare you first, darling," he suggests, and the fact that it's a request rather than a demand sends Will's confidence soaring all over again.

He shakes his head but pauses to lean forward to press his mouth against Hannibal's briefly. "This is the first time I get to do this and remember all of it," he explains as he moves again to accept Hannibal inside him. He is not stopped a second time. He's slick from arousal, not as much as when in heat but enough to ease the way, though it is still a burning stretch as he settles onto Hannibal's thick cock. He focuses on breathing and relaxing his body as he sinks down, doesn't speak again until he's fully seated and a moan is drawn from them both in unison. He arches forward to bury his face into the crook of Hannibal's neck as he adjusts to the intrusion. "I want to feel this for days." The Alpha's answering growl sends a shiver of pleasure through him.

Hannibal's hands run soothing passes over his thighs and hips as he nuzzles his face into Will's curls. "You did this the last night of your heat; when you started coming back to yourself. Do you remember?"

Will nods, smiles against his skin. "Vaguely. Did we take a bath, after?" he pulls back to meet Hannibal's eyes, gone almost completely red with his lust; his own eyes prickle and he knows that the Omega gold has surely overtaken blue. He rocks his hips and whimpers at the sensation. Hannibal is absolutely perfect inside him, like each of them was made specifically for the other.

"We did," he confirms, rocking his hips slowly in time with Will to increase the friction between them. "You pushed me down and took control, sought out your pleasure, and afterwards laid so sweetly against me in the water. It was the best part of my week."

Will moans at the declaration, arching his back and grinding down harder. Hannibal's hands run up his back, his chest, fist gentle but firm in his hair to pull their mouths back together. Will's fingers curl tightly into the coarse hair of Hannibal's chest, quickening his pace with short thrusts as he finds the perfect movement to brush along that sweet spot inside of him. Hannibal reaches between them to place a firm grip around Will's leaking cock, and a single stroke almost undoes him.

"Knot me," he moans, rocking down fully as the base of Hannibal's cock begins to swell. Hannibal moans with him, increasing the pace of his own hips in time with his hand on Will's throbbing erection. Will falls against the man beneath him, burying his face in his shoulder as he spasms and spirals with pleasure; his release throbs and spills over, catching Hannibal's

hand, both of their stomachs. The mess smears as Will continues to writhe into the waves of his orgasm. "*Hannibal,* " he whimpers, clenching around the Alpha, encouraging his own release. He does not ache for the Alpha's knot the way he would during heat, but he craves it all the same. A satisfied moan tears from his throat as he feels the fullness of the knot at its extent catch on his rim one last time before popping inside, feels Hannibal pulse within and fill him.

His body goes lax then, every bit of tension melted away as Will curls into Hannibal's chest and tucks his head under the Alpha's chin, seeking as much coverage as he can; were it possible, he would burrow into the man's torso. He couldn't stop the purr that rumbles through his chest even if he wanted to. Hannibal wraps his arms around Will's torso, his hands stroking praise up and down his back. Will nuzzles against Hannibal as his heart slows, breathing evens out; his teeth itch to sink into flesh but he tamps down on that desire, wonders if Hannibal feels the same urge.

"Beautiful, sweet thing," Hannibal murmurs into his hair. "You are so exquisitely unpredictable."

"I feel happy with you," Will whispers against the Alpha's chest; he's secured one arm around Will and brings the other up to stroke through his sweat-damp curls. "I never thought another person could make me feel like this. It just feels...it feels right. To be here with you." He risks pulling his head back, tilting up to meet Hannibal's gaze. He wonders, suddenly, if he'd have found this happiness sooner had it not been for the suppressants he refused to give up, knows that he has been drawn to Hannibal from the very beginning, as much as he had wished to deny it. If he hadn't been on suppressants, would the pull have been this strong from the beginning?

Hannibal rewards his eye contact with a soft, intimate kiss to his lips and all at once Will is certain that no other will ever make him feel this way; no other will be able to accept him for what he is.

He gives a soft hum, pressing forward to meld their lips together once more. "Will you help me?"

He knows that he could probably take care of this on his own with the knowledge that he has. But Hannibal has evaded the FBI for years with incredibly ostentatious tableaux, and that level of skill and experience could only aid him.

"Beautiful boy," Hannibal strokes along his jaw tenderly, tips his chin up to allow their lips to meet once more. "I am at your command."

They lay together until Hannibal's knot deflates and he fetches a warm cloth from the en suite to clean them up. The Alpha then insists on replenishing Will's energy stores by bringing him dessert in bed. The arrangement is undoubtedly in Will's favor; he gets to lie naked in bed while Hannibal fetches the flourless chocolate torte to feed him bite by bite. How could he refuse?

He knows that Hannibal prepared the sweet, rich dessert with Will in mind; the strawberries served with the cake only add another layer of fresh, tart sweetness to each bite, each of

which Will accepts while stretched languidly on his stomach. After the dessert is promptly devoured, shared between the two of them (though Will is sure he gets twice as many bites as Hannibal does), Hannibal sets the empty plate aside on the nightstand and chases the lingering chocolate that sweetens Will's tongue.

They lay stretched out, pressed flush against each other, exchanging tender, lazy kisses and equally tender caresses, for what feels like an hour and a minute all at once. Will is just about to check the time when Hannibal speaks.

"Stay with me tonight," he suggests, requests.

And without hesitation, Will accepts. He'd fed his pack before he left, after all. They will be fine for the night. If anything, there may be a mess to clean up in the morning. Will doesn't need to waste any time weighing out the benefits with the potential drawback. He presses ever closer to the Alpha, rocking his hips against the solid form beside him as he cock begins to thicken with desire once again. He licks into Hannibal's mouth, moans when the Alpha shifts his leg to bear more firmly against Will's arousal.

"Take me," he murmurs between kisses, curls his fingers to claws and scratches along the length of the Alpha's torso. "Mount me," he whimpers, because *God*, the friction is so good, and though his hole is sore from taking Hannibal's knot without preparation before it's still leaking slick and come, waiting to be filled again.

A low growl erupts from Hannibal's chest and he twists them, presses Will into the mattress as he rocks against him. "Is that what you want?" he asks roughly against Will's mouth, moves his lips south to explore the column of Will's arched neck. "Make no mistake: I will dominate you, sweet thing, if that is what you desire. I will mount you and fuck you until you cannot speak, if that is what you wish."

Will whimpers at the words; *fuck*, but Hannibal is so good at the play, his smooth and sinful voice an aphrodisiac in and of itself. "*Yes*," Will moans. "Claim me, Alpha," he begs, arching up into the solid form of his lover above him.

Hannibal growls again, pulls back and flips Will over effortlessly, and the show of strength and control only serves to heighten Will's arousal. Firm hands clutch at his hips, pull him up insistently until he is presenting his ass like a proper Omega. Will waits with anticipation for Hannibal's hard length to spear him open, fuck into him like an animal until they both come.

He does not expect the hands that grip his ass to spread him apart to expose him, nor the hot, wet tongue that laps across his twitching hole. Will cries out at the sensation, foreign and somehow not, because suddenly hazy memories from his heat are surfacing in his mind, reminding him that Hannibal was dutiful in worshiping every inch of him, rather than just seeking a place to bury his knot. Will buries his face with a broken sob and curls his fists into the sheets, tilting his hips up further yet as Hannibal licks into him, works him open. Just like he'd asked if he could.

The Alpha alternates between slow, thick stripes with the flat of his tongue across him and pointing the muscle to spear into his entrance. When Will lets out a whine and his hips squirm, his mate applies an iron grip to hold him in place, delving into him even farther. Will

sobs at the stimulation, his entire body quivering with need. Every touch sends him spiraling, every intrusion a cruel tease to what he truly desires.

More slick pours out of him and Hannibal laps it up with an almost lewd and shameless moan. “Fuck, Hannibal, please,” Will pants; his cock is painfully hard, leaking across the sheets below but his hips are tilted high enough that there is no friction for him to grind against. “Please, inside. Fill me, Alpha.”

And Hannibal complies, rearing back with a low growl and aligning his thick cock with Will’s hole before thrusting in, unrelenting, pausing only when he’s buried as far as he can be.

Will cries out again, this time with the pure satisfaction of being filled; his hips surge back to encourage the Alpha to move, but Hannibal is content to stay buried within him, infuriatingly still.

He grips Will’s hip with one hand, strokes tenderly up and down his spine with the other. “Lovely Will,” he rasps, his normally smooth voice rough with his desire, his accent thick with it, “I’m not sure you even understand how truly magnificent you are.” He pulls out almost completely, thrusts back in and stills again. “How completely you own me.” Another thrust, angled just so to spear against Will’s prostate, pulling a keening wail from the Omega; a hand fists and pounds once against the mattress as he pants. “If I could spend the rest of my days doing only one thing,” he grunts, his thrusts picking up pace, “it would be to see you crumbling with pleasure over and over again.”

“*Fuck*, Hannibal, just...just like that,” his demand turns to a pitiful whimper as Hannibal brushes against his prostate once again. “Just--fuck--there, *please*.”

Hannibal’s thrusts grow shorter at Will’s instruction, more frequent, to draw across that part of him that has the Omega sweating and shaking beneath him.

“I”m gonna come,” Will whines, “Just like that, just--” with a breaking moan, Will clenches tight and spills forth, his orgasm pulsing through him though his cock has remained untouched. At the height of his pleasure he can feel Hannibal bury into him one more time, his swollen knot forcing itself in to fill him, to keep Hannibal’s hot release trapped inside.

Will falls slack as his orgasm finishes tearing through him and Hannibal is quick to catch his weight, twisting them gently onto their sides to spoon, still locked tightly together. He nuzzles into the sweaty hair at the nape of Will’s neck. “Beautiful thing,” he murmurs, his lips brushing along the sensitive skin. Will gives a sleepy, content hum at the praise. “My lovely Patroclus; we will conquer this world together.”

A humored huff erupts from Will’s throat. “If I am Patroclus, then you are Achilles.”

Hannibal brushes his lips along the column of Will’s neck, up to rest against the shell of his ear. “And you are my heel,” he whispers fondly.

Will gives a soft whine at the thought of being such a formidable man’s only weakness. Fingers tangle through his hair, stroke along his scalp. Will closes his eyes, relaxes into the

sensation. He's somewhere closer to sleep that waking when Hannibal speaks again.

"I wish to bond with you," the words are murmured lazily into the skin of Will's neck, as though he's not just suggested an act that is both incredibly intimate and irrevocable.

Will tenses in the Alpha's arms. Knotted as he is, he can't turn around to face him. "You don't think it's a little soon for that?"

"Our relationship may be newly intimate, but we've known each other for a year, Will," he continues to stroke through Will's hair, unbothered by his hesitation. "And I've been waiting far longer than that to find someone like you. Truthfully, I never imagined it possible." He places a trail of soft kisses up the column of Will's neck, nuzzles his scent gland when he reaches Will's ear.

Will sighs at the sensation, melting back against Hannibal's solid warmth. He understands what Hannibal means--until recently he never gave much thought to taking a mate because he never really believed that there was someone out there that he would want; someone that would want him. The thought of bonding with Hannibal is an incredibly appealing one. It is also permanent. If things didn't work out, if they chose to part ways, they would each spend the rest of their lives never able to feel truly fulfilled.

Or one of them would have to die. Mariticide between bonded mates is fairly uncommon, but then Hannibal and Will aren't exactly the picture of normality, are they?

Hannibal doesn't pressure him, doesn't grow irritated by Will's thoughtful silence. He simply continues to nuzzle his neck fondly, his hand releasing Will's curls to stroke down the side of his body; it lingers at his hip, slender fingers tracing along the bone that protrudes there.

"I want to," Will breaks the silence at long last. "But I need to wait." The knot within him has finally deflated enough for them to part, and Will turns in Hannibal's arms. He's relieved to find that Hannibal looks more amused than annoyed at Will's obstinance. "Stopping my suppressants...I feel like I've shifted into a completely different person, like I've devolved to only following my base instincts. I don't regret the way certain events have played out," he assures Hannibal, biting his lower lip to stop the mischievous smirk that threatens to curl his lips. He runs his fingertips through the hair on the Alpha's chest, wiggles closer to tangle their legs together. "Quite the opposite, really. But…"

"You need to see if these feelings plateau, or possibly fade, before you can make such a commitment," Hannibal finishes for him.

"Not my feelings for you," Will specifies. He raises a hand to cradle Hannibal's strong jaw, runs a thumb over his ridiculously attractive cheekbone. "I've felt an attraction for you from the very beginning. But this gnawing desire to be claimed, to be bonded and cared for...that's new. It's not something I ever thought I would want. I need time for my hormones to balance out, to see if, down the line…"

"I understand, Will. This isn't something I would ever want you to feel rushed or pressured into."

A snort leaves Will’s mouth before he can bite it back. “I know that. Such a proper gentleman. You weren’t sure if you could even kiss me during my heat.”

Hannibal’s lips quirk into a smile; he raises a hand up to cup Will’s own jaw, running a thumb along his bottom lip. “But I know now,” his low tone sends a shiver through Will.

Will’s tongue darts out to run across his lip, catches the tip of Hannibal’s thumb. Hannibal slips his fingers below Will’s chin to tip his face up, angle him closer. Will closes the distance to let their lips meet.

They exchange soft kisses until sleep takes them.

In Hannibal’s arms, Will doesn’t dream.

Chapter End Notes

I know nothing about flowers and their meanings apart from the most common ones. Wikipedia gave me a list of flower/plant symbolism that I worked from. I picked only based on the sentiment I wanted to convey, not heeding plant origin. I figure Hannibal is not the type to worry about obtaining blossoms naturally found in Africa or South America or such places because, c'mon, he's Hannibal. Of course that wouldn't stop him.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal go a-hunting! With varying success.

Chapter Notes

We're in the end game, kids. I'm plowing through these last few chapters and getting the rest of this posted if it kills me. I am absolutely notorious for posting half-finished work and then abandoning it completely but NOT THIS TIME!

As luck would have it, Will does not have lectures on Fridays. Therefore, he returns to Wolf Trap from Baltimore the next morning to see to his pack. He readies their breakfast and then runs about with them outside, dutifully throwing any sticks that are delivered to him while simultaneously watching, amused, as the squirrels that inhabit the nearby trees torment the more excitable members of the pack by dashing around on the ground and then scaling the bark to safety. This leaves several of his dogs whining, forlorn, at the trunks of the oaks that line his property.

I'll have to find homes for some of them soon.

The thought is as surprising as it is sudden, and has Will immediately questioning himself. Will he? Just the previous evening he was telling Hannibal he wasn't ready to commit to a bond yet, now he's setting plans to dismantle the only life he's known?

He shakes the thought off, does his best to keep them entertained and tire them out in the process so he can feel less guilty about the fact that he is about to abandon them to their own devices much sooner than a responsible pet owner should.

When they return to the house he slinks off to the shower, letting the hot water sluice through sweat new and old, washing his stomach and thighs properly for the first time since he left for Hannibal's the previous night.

He stands under the hot jet of water, steam billowing up around him. He braces himself with a forearm against the tiled wall and lets the water cascade against him, recalls their activities the previous evening, hell, even that morning, when they had woken sated and yet somehow still aroused, fit into and against each other and rocked lazy and languid until pleasure stole them both. Afterwards, Hannibal had made him breakfast, because of course he had.

Will whimpered, the sound drowned by pounding water, when he realized that just thinking back on those moments had his cock throbbing at attention. *I feel like a horny fucking teenager,* he groans as he fists his hard length, stroking it mechanically to soothe the ache rising in him. *I've come three times in the last twelve hours and yet… Christ.*

He squeezes his eyes shut as the water strikes his crown and runs in streams to drip down and off his bowed head. His fist is tight, unrelenting, almost punishing in its grip as he works himself to completion. He gasps breaths through his mouth, wishing that it was his Alpha's delicious scent--yes, *his*, because even though they haven't bonded yet he knows intrinsically that Hannibal is his, just as much as he is Hannibal's--that fills his lungs rather than hot steam. He tightens the grip on his cock, imagining that the exquisite pressure is from being buried inside his Alpha, rather than from his own fist. He knows immediately in that moment that Hannibal would let him, should he request it. Most assuredly, very few Alphas would allow it but Hannibal would. *Fuck*, Hannibal would probably *beg* for it, worshiping Will as he does. He would squirm and whine and buck up against him until he was filled by his Omega, writhing still until he could feel Will's release inside him, marking him, claiming him as his own as much as teeth to his neck would--

Will cries out as he spills across his fist, sagging more heavily still against the tiled wall of his shower as sated pleasure and unmitigated desire pulses through him. "*Hannibal,"* he gasps, because he can't help but adore the way the syllables fall off of his lips, even if the object of his obsession and affection is nowhere near him.

He shudders and heaves for breath beneath the stream of water until it grows lukewarm, then borders on cold. When he has dried off and feels as though he's sufficiently patched together the shambled pieces of himself, he does a head count to make sure the whole of his pack is accounted for and then, with a mostly sincere apology, leaves them confined within the house once more.

He loves his pack and would spend all day tromping around in the fields with them if he could, but he has more important, time-sensitive things to attend to.

He tries not to feel guilty as he drives away.

It takes time. He knows this, both instinctively and from his experience on the force. Stakeouts take time.

And yet...he can't help feeling anxious, uncertain, unhinged, when he has sat at his vantage point for seven hours and has yet to see any glimpse of the man for which he is searching.

Shane Simmons was very certain that Wilcox knew about this location, that he would turn to it as a place to hide in plain sight while waiting for his mate and yet…

And yet there's been no indication of occupation. Not even the kids that Shane had previously described ditching the library with to seek more *unsupervised* activities. It was as though Shane's attack had rendered the entire vacant structure useless. He doesn't even see any vagrants entering the premises to escape the growing autumn cold.

“Well, *shit*,” Will spits, wondering how much longer he should wait for activity. He tries, valiantly, not to do the mental math as to how far away from Hannibal’s home he is. Even if it *is* an easy twenty-three minute drive, that doesn’t mean that the man is available for visitors anyways. In fact, knowing Hannibal, he probably already has guests over for dinner.

Will attempts, very fervently, not to be irritated and jealous at the thought.

That’s who he is, his more logical mind soothes. *Ever the host and, as far as you know, always amicably rather than romantically. Unless it’s you.*

He shakes that thought off, because it does even less to bolster his concentration than the thought of Hannibal entertaining strangers does. He sighs, finally, feeling as though the whole ‘operation’ has come to a close. If Wilcox is using the building he is not leaving it--at least not during the day.

So. Will is faced with the decision to slip inside and sleuth around, wait in his car for any sign of activity, or give up altogether and go back to Hannibal’s. *Wolf Trap*, he corrects himself. After all, he has no reason to visit Hannibal’s place.

Other than the soul-crushing, deep-seated need to feel the Alpha encompassing and invading him, that is.

It’s dank inside, musty. Even if it were still daylight out, very little natural light would filter through due to the boarded up windows, leaving the space a black hole of darkness. Will is glad for the cell phone-turned-flashlight that he carries with him. It’s evident immediately that children roust here; graffiti on the walls, refuse in the form of fast food containers, cigarette butts and soda bottles littering the floor and corners. He can see where old things left behind by the previous business--cash registers, mannequins, neon signs--have been bashed in and vandalized by the local youth.

No sign of any prolonged habitation, though. No sign of the Beta he seeks. It seems even that the boys that Shane had described have opted not to return to their venue of freedom. Perhaps they understand that they had drawn a predator to this place with their youthful, rebellious exuberance.

Will sighs at the lack of leads, extricates himself from the broken alleyway window, and tromps back to his car. Whatever Shane speculated about Wilcox wanting to stay close and spend time in that ruin, that was obviously not the case. The thought has him wondering when he began putting so much stock into the opinion of a twelve year old.

Which means that the killer is hiding out somewhere else; somewhere equally private and, likely, someplace that affords a fine vantage point of the potential mate that he seeks.

Will slides into the driver’s side seat, inserts the keys but pauses before he turns the ignition, pulling out his phone.

He bites his lip as he stares at the black screen for a full minute before unlocking it and clicking into his contacts. He punches out a message to Hannibal, hits send before he can think better of it.

He turns the ignition and puts the car into drive without waiting for a response. He's semi-concerned that he will end up over at Hannibal's if he doesn't just start driving to Wolf Trap now. It means not being able to check his phone for about an hour, but perhaps that's for the best. The last thing he wants to do is crowd the Alpha after he just refused to bond with him.

It takes an astounding amount of self-control to place his full focus on driving home while his fingers itch every few minutes to pick up the cell and check for a response.

If he were anyone else, he might not risk it.

But Hannibal is confident in his intelligence, his intuition and his luck. After all, he would not have survived undetected all these years if any of the aforementioned factors were less than infallible.

It is risky, but all the same he finds himself sitting in a hired car (under a presumed name, of course), watching the men that are watching Shane Simmons. The boy has had a detail trailing his every move since he left the hospital, which in and of itself is simple enough considering mother has essentially had him under house arrest since the day he was nearly taken. The officers are also expected to be watching the surrounding area for any sign of the Beta that attacked the boy in the first place.

They are quite obviously not dedicated to their task, considering Hannibal has made multiple passes through the neighborhood that week, has been sitting there today for several hours, and the officers have made no note of his presence at all. It is an absurdly fortunate combination of expertly floating below the radar and complete inattention from the protection unit.

He can see them in their car outside the boy's house; turned towards each other, obviously in some animated discussion as their hands flail about and their heads nod emphatically. He's certain that if they were Jack Crawford's men they would be taking the situation a bit more seriously. As luck would have it, the detail has been sent by the local police, replaced every eight hours, and so far Hannibal has noted three different rotations of officers and all equally inept.

This bodes well for him, as he is certain that he is the only one to notice that the shadow along the side of the house--the side that contains Shane's room on the ground floor--lengthens and shifts ever so slightly, before melting away again. It could easily be an acquaintance of Shane's, considering the boy has essentially been kept in isolation for the last several days. It could just as easily be the Suitor.

Hannibal focuses is keen eyes on the spot where he saw the shadow fade away, combing through the darkness of the backyard, along the edges of the property until-- Yes. There. Just a glint, but certainly larger than any boy that would be visiting his detained friend. He

watches as the shape of a man shifts back further into the shadow of the tree and then skirts across the open space of the neighboring backyard. He watches as he flits between two houses on the street parallel to his own.

He starts up his car, passes by the two officers, unaware of his presence as they continue whatever discussion or argument they've been drawn into. He just makes it around the adjacent corner when he catches the now familiar shadow in his peripheral vision, melting into the darkness of a home that sits dark and quiet, a very conspicuous 'for sale by owner' sign speared into the front yard near the sidewalk.

Hannibal smiles to himself, drives past the house without hesitation, glancing over only briefly to note the address of the vacant property. When he reaches the next intersection, he turns toward home. There's no need to hover around and arouse the suspicion of the Beta. He won't be giving up such a pragmatic sanctum unless he feels threatened. Hannibal endeavors to return in the next day or so. He will need to act quickly, if the Suitor is already feeling bold enough to risk peering into Shane Simmons' window.

He parks the hired car down the street from his own home. As he walks up to the front door he pulls out his phone to find that Will had texted him not twenty minutes previous. He can't stop his lips from curling into a smirk at the message.

Just wasted my day following the lead of a twelve year old. Wilcox is not in the abandoned store on Hadley. Hasn't been near it. Please tell me your day is going better.

I am sorry to hear of your troubles. My own day has been remarkably productive. Better yet, now that I've heard from you.

Hannibal fixes a light kale salad as a late supper, helps himself to a generous pour of a Sauvignon Blanc. He's long since retired to his study with a second glass when his phone buzzes nearly an hour later.

I'll be honest. I was conveniently close to your place in a very inconvenient way. The temptation to stop around was...overwhelming.

The Alpha smiles at the message, takes another sip of wine.

And yet you resisted. Such a strong-willed thing you are.

He sends off the message, considers the conversation thread for a moment, and then begins typing anew.

For the record, your presence would have been more than tolerated.

No need to let the Omega know that he wouldn't have been home to greet him. The response is nearly instantaneous.

Good to know. I was a little concerned that I've been wearing out my welcome over there.

Impossible.

I missed you today.

Is that crazy? I only just left you this morning. But I can't stop thinking about...everything. In a good way. And I can't stop thinking about what might be happening right now if I'd broken down and gone there instead of home.

Well *that* is certainly interesting. Hannibal's smile grows; a curious thread of warmth weaves its way through his gut almost seductively. The things this Omega does to him...

What, pray tell, dear William, do you expect would be happening?

For starters, I imagine both of us would be wearing far fewer clothes.

You do have quite a gifted imagination. Tell me more.

There is a stretch of several minutes wherein Hannibal begins to wonder if he's overstepped, and then his phone begins the incessant buzzing rhythm indicating that a call is coming through.

He answers it, gets the phone to his ear. Before he can issue a greeting, the Omega is speaking.

"You would have me spread out beneath you. Your hands and lips would be exploring every inch of me you could reach," Will's voice is low, raspy with arousal, his breaths heavy and erratic. He imagines it is very likely that Will is already touching himself.

"That *does* sound like something I would do," Hannibal responds with a purr, sinking back farther into his chair near the fireplace and taking another leisurely sip of wine. "You've always responded favorably to such endeavors in the past. Tell me, Will, where would you like me to focus my attention?"

A low whine slips through the receiver, cut off by a hitched breath. Hannibal's smirk grows; if he wasn't certain that Will had been touching himself before… "My neck," he gasps after a moment. "I love it when you kiss my neck. When I can feel your teeth…" he whines again.

"The neck is a very vulnerable place, especially for an Omega. Why do you think it brings you such pleasure to bare yourself to me in this way?"

"It's dangerous," Will breathes, and Hannibal could have guessed as much. "You could force bond me. You could tear my throat out if you wanted to."

"Fortunate for the both of us that I am interested in doing neither. You show a great amount of trust when you allow me to play with you there, though I wonder if trust is the only motivation." Will makes a soft questioning sound, nearly swallowed by the sounds of the empath chasing his pleasure in the tight grip of his fist; he is not trying to hide at all anymore what is taking place in his lonely little bed fifty miles away. "Is there not also, on some level, a certain amount of desire present as well? I wonder if perhaps there is a part of you that longs for me to use my superior strength to pin you down and make you mine in every fashion imaginable. Mark you with my claws and teeth and come. Bind you to me forever."

Another aborted gasp. "*Hannibal*--" he's familiar by now with the many intonations of Will's moans and whines. The boy is quite close to finishing.

"Ever more interestingly," Hannibal continues, relentless. Oh, how he wishes he could see Will coming apart before him with just his words. It is a beautiful sight to behold. "I wonder if there isn't a part of you that revels in the thought of the latter as well. Tell me, Will: when you consider the opportunity for me to sink my teeth into your throat and rent you open, when you think about bleeding out, your last spasms caught in my grasp, is it terror that fills you? Or something else entirely?"

"Oh--*fuck*--" Will's curse morphs into the telling cry of his release spilling forward. Hannibal waits in silence as his quick breathing eventually begins to even out, feeling more than a little smug. It would seem that his first attempt at phone sex was quite successful. "That was…" Will pants after a moment, "*Christ,* Hannibal."

"A delightful turn of events," Hannibal agrees.

"Did you…?"

He lets out a soft hum at the question. "I'm afraid that my age combined with the distinct lack of hormonal gymnastics that your suppressant withdrawal is putting you through has rendered my refractory period less...enthusiastic than your own. Rest assured, it was enjoyable all the same."

He hears a soft snort on the other end. "Is that your flowery way of saying I wore you out last night?"

"I believe *you* were the one reduced to a simpering heap by the end, my dear Will. I also recall a rather astounding performance this morning." That in and of itself wasn't altogether true; their session that morning having been less than rigorous. It was slow but heated, intimate in a way that Hannibal had never experienced with any past dalliances. Will didn't feel the need to call him out on the exaggeration. "Come for dinner tomorrow. We can see just how accurate your predictions turn out to be."

Will gives a breathless hum. "When do you want me?"

"Dear boy, I *always* want you," Hannibal rejoins, Will emits a strangled sound that seems to be a combination of amusement and desire. "Your presence would be appreciated at five."

"So early?"

Hannibal smiles at the empty room. "I believe the time has come to teach you a thing or two. Tomorrow, my darling, we will cook together."

It's easy enough to find the listing online; Hannibal studies the posted house plan and pictures on his tablet as he sips at a coffee. Due to the location of the lot, there are no areas of the house that would offer a vantage point to the Simmons' home. Hannibal is left to

determine where Wilcox may be squatting by sheer estimation. He would want to hole-up in a spot where his movement wouldn't be noted by any prying neighbors. The basement seems a likely spot; as luck would have it, there is outside access to it. There is also an attached garage.

He finds that a cup of coffee and two glasses of water is more than enough to counteract the wine he had imbibed earlier. Hannibal can't fathom what he was thinking, having a second glass of wine when he has work to do this evening. But he feels calm and confident as he slips from his house and down the street to where he left the rental car. Traffic is nearly nonexistent at this hour, and he's back in the Simmons' neighborhood within thirty minutes.

He approaches the vacant house from the other side of the block, careful to leave a wide berth between his vehicle and the street the Simmons' house sits on. At this time of night he is sure his presence would be noted, no matter how inept the protection detail. It's simple enough to sidle up to the house silently, and when he reaches the back cellar door to the basement Hannibal can see that he needn't even pick the lock--it was broken previously, likely when that brute of a Beta decided to take residence here.

He slips inside, careful to pull the door shut silently behind him, pauses for a moment to scent the air. Betas don't emit pheromones the way Alphas and Omegas do, but Hannibal doesn't need him to--he still has an exceptionally sharp sense of smell.

Pungent sweat meets him first, followed by a sharp rancid scent that Hannibal can only describe as anxiety with undertones of depression and self-loathing. And he can feel the nervous energy--the air seems to hum with it--prickling at his predator sense. In a single instant, his hunger for the hunt seems to intensify ten-fold; there is prey here. He can't help but feel forlorn knowing that he won't be shedding blood this evening. He steps lightly, as ever, following the scent through the laundry room from which he had entered and into the main area of the basement, his ears perked for any sign of life.

Even, rasping breaths sound from a heap of blankets in the far corner of the family room, just on the edge of soft snores, and Hannibal can feel his features twist into a frown. Asleep. He doesn't get to shed blood and he won't even get a fight or chase out of this. He approaches silently until he's standing over the pathetic Alpha-impostor, reaches into his pocket and then reconsiders. He should know. The next time he wakes, it will not be to groggy confusion, but utter terror.

He falls upon the sleeping man, thrilling when he jerks awake and begins to thrash. Hannibal distributes his weight to pin the Beta down, seizes his arms, weak and sluggish from sleep, before he can even hope to begin beating back his attacker. When Wilcox's arms are stretched above his head securely, Hannibal let's his face hang over the man, a cruel smile twisting his lips.

"Mr. Wilcox. You have been terribly naughty these past few months."

The Beta seems to realize that this is not a police raid, that the Alpha holding him down is something much more dangerous to face. His eyes widen further yet and he renews his jerking to get free even as his prey-mind senses hopelessness and he wets himself in fear.

Hannibal grunts in dismay at the damp mess as the bitter odor of ammonia and urine fills the room; it is not going to be a pleasant ride home.

“You’ve upset my mate, you see. And I simply can’t have that.”

“Wh--what--what--” Wilcox begins to stammer in terror and confusion, and already Hannibal is bored. He ensures that he can keep a strong grip on the man’s wrists with one hand (not that great of a feat, considering the pathetic Beta beneath him) and reaches into his coat pocket to retrieve the hypodermic needle.

“We can chat more later,” Hannibal ensures his prey as he plunges the needle into his soft and sweaty neck. When thrashing limbs turn to dead weight, Hannibal hoists the Beta up and deposits him in the kitchen upstairs, next to the door to the attached garage.

Opening and closing the garage door at this time of night is risky, but the neighborhood seems to remain quiet. He’s also not fond of parking the rental car in his own garage, but when the choice is between that and hauling an unconscious man over his shoulder down the block and through his front door, Hannibal goes with the lesser of two evils.

From there, all that’s left to do is make sure that his guest is comfortable for the time being (and begin pre-treating the mess on his trousers). It’s nearly six in the morning before Hannibal slips into bed, but given that it’s a Saturday he is afforded the luxury of a late start to his day. His only imperative task is a visit to the store to ensure that his pantry is stocked with anything he may need for dinner. A dinner that he and Will shall be cooking together.

Hannibal drifts to sleep with a smile on his face.

Will arrives at ten to five and lets himself in as he had been instructed via text earlier that day. He finds his lover in the kitchen and knows immediately that Hannibal is up to something, looking like the devil himself clad in a stunning suit black as pitch with a blood red tie and shirt. There’s a satisfied glint in the Alpha’s amber eyes and the hint of an anticipatory smirk tugging at the edge of his mouth. Will presses forward to greet him with a kiss and Hannibal is quick to fold his arms around the Omega to pull him closer still.

Will gives an amused hum as he presses their lips together once more. “You’re in a good mood today.”

“I am,” Hannibal admits; his hands trail down to lock around Will’s low back, allowing him to pull back slightly but not away.

Will’s eyebrow hitches up involuntarily. “Any particular reason why?”

“The pleasure of your company isn’t reason enough?” Hannibal rejoins, and Will barks out a laugh, pulling away to fill the empty glass on the island with the wine sitting next to it.

“Only if you think me dumb enough to believe it,” he shoots back wryly, taking a sip of the thick red; it’s the same kind as the night they discussed Will’s heat, the one with traces of

cinnamon and blackcurrants. He smiles into his glass as he feels the solid heat of Hannibal's form press against his back, his arms wrapping around Will's waist.

He nuzzles into the hair by Will's ear briefly, and Will preens at the affection, tipping back slightly to rest against his Alpha's chest. "I could never think that," he murmurs, lips brushing along the shell of Will's ear and then continuing lower to mouth at his neck. Without a thought, Will tips his head to the side with a sigh, encouraging the tender ministrations. Hannibal pauses when he reaches the sensitive skin where his neck and shoulder join, speaking against flesh. "I have something for you."

Will gives another amused hum, shifting his hips back to press against Hannibal's groin. "I'm sure you do. Aren't we meant to be making dinner?"

"I've accounted for the time," Hannibal assures him, bringing one hand up to pull the wine glass from his grip and abandoning it on the counter. "Come with me," he instructs lowly, tugging Will into movement.

Another snort is torn from Will at the phrasing. "You're leaving yourself wide open today," he teases, but follows Hannibal's lead all the same, reaching out to twine their fingers together. He loves this. He loves how easy this all feels with Hannibal when, for the vast majority of his life, every other relationship, every connection, has felt so incredibly *difficult.* He wonders, not for the first time since Hannibal brought it up the other night, if there truly is a reason to wait. His heart sings when he thinks about being even more connected to his Alpha. Officially. Wholly.

Hannibal has brought them to the pantry, and Will opens his mouth to issue forth another smart comment when he senses the abrupt mood shift, closes it again. The Alpha gazes at the floor of the pantry, wetting his lips thoughtfully.

"No one has ever seen this before," Hannibal tells him softly. His eyes flick up to meet Will's and his heart clenches at the blatant vulnerability in them. It strikes Will suddenly that though they have been carnally intimate, before this moment he has never seen Hannibal naked.

Will gives his lover's hand a squeeze. "Show me," he whispers. Anticipation swells in him, and he fights to keep his breathing steady. When Hannibal releases his hand to open up a catch in the floor, however, his heart begins to pound.

He takes up Will's hand once more and begins to guide him down the revealed stairway into the darkness of the basement. He pauses after a few steps to close the entrance behind them and Will goes rigid in the darkness until Hannibal returns his attention to carefully guiding Will along. Though Hannibal's steps are sure, Will's feet instinctively feel out to map each step before placing down any weight and he breathes a sigh of relief when they finally reach the bottom. He can hear the distinctive sound of Hannibal flipping a light switch and Will is blinded by the sudden change.

The basement is large and chilly; it looks to span the entirety of the kitchen as well as the dining room. There's a door on one end that appears lead to a walk-in freezer. There are stainless steel tables and cabinets, lending a very clinical and sterile feel to the space. He doesn't have time to wonder what all might tucked away in the storage down there.

As be blinks for rapidly for a moment, willing his eyes to adjust more quickly, he gives the room a cursory sweep. His attention snaps to the gift laid out before him, his heart lurching at the sight.

Near the center of the floor to one side of the room, on a metal slab bolted to the ground near a drain in the floor:

The reason that Will has seen frail, lifeless limbs mottled with bruises every time he closes his eyes for *months.* A pathetic excuse of a man, even for a Beta.

Emmett Wilcox.

Alive, Will can tell immediately, though obviously drugged into unconsciousness, his ankles and wrists binding him to the table and his fate.

“Oh, Hannibal,” Will sighs, his stomach flipping with excitement and his chest swelling with affection. “It’s perfect.”

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Will exacts justice, cooks dinner with Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

I've updated the tags but I will state it again here: the first part of this chapter contains VERY graphic depictions of torture and mutilation. If you've made is this far into the story such things probably don't bother you, but ye be warned all the same.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There is a very odd combination of emotions flooding through Will.

Shock and elation are at the forefront; that Hannibal would do this for him...it is a gesture, a gift, like none other he has ever received. A bit of a silly thought, he realizes, because of course no one has ever abducted and restrained a serial killer for his murdering pleasure before now, but he can't help but compare it to every other kindness in his life regardless.

A visceral twist of excitement makes his stomach clench; a vicious, vindictive hunger for vengeance runs cold through his veins. His hands curl into fists at his sides; he hopes that the uncomfortable bite of his blunt nails into his palms will quell the adrenaline-fueled tremor that shakes through them.

Beneath it all, an ever burgeoning affection for the Alpha beside him. It is an emotion that warms his chest as well as his cheeks, and he's alarmed by the word that his mind is choosing for which to label it.

One unimaginable situation at a time, he urges himself.

One deep breath, one shiver of pleasure and anticipation down his spine, and then Will stalks up to the table, head tilting as he considers the prey laid out for him. The Beta's limbs are twitching restlessly, low grunts issuing from his throat. He's already been divested of his clothing and his body is producing constant tremors in response to the chilled air.

"Will he wake soon?"

Hannibal's arms wrap around him from behind, his chin resting on his shoulder and Will can't hope to quell the stupid grin that pulls at his lips. "Shouldn't be long now," Hannibal

murmurs near his ear. “I *could* administer something, but--”

“The meat,” Will nods. It makes sense; if they hope to harvest any of their prey they need to use drugs sparingly. The way Hannibal’s grip tightens on him is infinitesimal, but noticeable to Will all the same. “Will the Ripper display him?” The softness, the reverence in his voice when he says the name is unplanned, unintentional, but entirely warranted; he can feel the rumble of a purr through Hannibal’s chest against his back.

“He can’t disappear completely; it would be prudent to wrap up the case, and Shane Simmons will never feel safe if he believes his would-be abductor is still at large,” Hannibal reasons. “It doesn’t have to be the Ripper. We could simply dump his body somewhere, just as he did with his own victims.”

As Will considers his words, the Beta before him stirs and groans. Excitement seizes him. For so long he has desperately smothered the darkness threatening to rise up within him. Every time he stepped into the mind of a killer: buried deep within the disgust of their actions, just a twinge of jealousy at their freedom. So many times, pitiful excuses of humanity brought to so called ‘justice’ by trial, shipped away to prison where they will keep living, despite the numerous lives destroyed by them.

He must have always known what Hannibal could offer him; the reason that the truth of the monster in the man only drew him closer rather than repelled him.

He could have it all. The darkness and the blood. The vengeance and the justification.

Judge, jury and executioner and, above it all, a mate that would encourage rather than demoralize, elevate rather than condemn. And he *wants* it. He wants it so much he can scarcely breathe.

“One more thing, before we begin,” Hannibal pulls away to retrieve two bundles of clear plastic from a cabinet in the corner. “It will be a bit large on you, but it should do the trick this time.” He states as he passes one over to Will.

This time. The words produce a pleasant clench in Will's gut. He watches as Hannibal shakes out his own bundle and begins to step into it.

Will can’t help but laugh. “A *murder suit*? Wow. Very Patrick Bateman,” he coughs on his next chuckle at Hannibal’s reproachful glare, clears his throat. “Much more elegant, of course,” he amends in an attempt to regain the Alpha’s favor. Favor that he loses nearly immediately again with another burst of laughter. “Oh my God, it has booties and everything.”

“Would you rather sacrifice your clothing tonight? Risk leaving evidence behind?” Hannibal asks shortly. “Perhaps you’d prefer to work nude--”

“Hey,” Will closes the distance between them, lays a placating hand on Hannibal’s arm. “Hey,” he says again softly, fondly. “I’m sorry. It’s smart, obviously. It just...surprised me.” He fights the curl of his lips, puts them to better use by pressing them to Hannibal’s.

A pitiful whimper draws Will's focus back to his prey and he pulls away to step into his own suit. Hannibal's frame is longer than his own but they are both lean, so although it's baggy and a little long in the arms it will do just fine. Hannibal's, of course, is just as bespoke as the custom three-piece suit beneath it.

They step up to the table and Will reaches forward to give three light taps to the Beta's face, urging him to rouse faster. "Rise and shine, Mr. Wilcox."

The bound man blinks blearily, turns his head toward Will. Confusion clouds his eyes, then a quick strike of terror before he seems to realize that there's an Omega standing before him. And then his pupils dilate with desire, and his jaw parts to draw in a scent he can't hope to obtain.

Will scoffs at him, clamping his hand over the man's open mouth, pinching his nostrils closed in the process for good measure. "Cut that out. You can't scent me, asshole. You're a *Beta*." The Beta in question spears a wet tongue out to swipe across Will's palm, and he recoils with a shudder of disgust. "Ugh, *seriously?!"* he glares at his own hand for a moment, as though it were responsible for the offence, before wiping it off emphatically with a slight squeak on the leg of his plastic suit.

From behind him, Hannibal gives a low growl. "What will you do with him, meilužis?"

For the first time, Will considers the wide variety of tools that have been set out on a standing tray near the table. "He fancies himself an Alpha…" he murmurs, lets his fingers ghost over the instruments of torture and death until he reaches what looks close enough to pliers for him. "I would see him robbed of any feature even *resembling* one."

Will couldn't say if it was his disgust, his words, or the tool that he held in his hand, but in the space of a heartbeat Wilcox's demeanor shifted from groggy desire to horrified panic. "W-wait--what--?"

"His jaw, please," Will requests quietly, and Hannibal moves forward instantly at his command to grip Wilcox's jaw tightly and pry it open. Wilcox gives a very satisfying gurgle of alarm at the action. Will shifts his body until he is near the head of the table, opening and closing the pliers in his hand with contemplation. He turns his gaze to the Beta's terror-filled, watering eyes. "I should like to see you stripped of everything you used to violate those boys. Starting with your pathetic excuse for fangs."

Panicked grunts of protest eek out of Wilcox's open maw as his words register, but Hannibal's strength is infallible and he holds Will's target steady as he positions the pliers to grasp at the Beta's left incisor and gives it a vicious tug.

Wilcox's howl of pain is dampened by the blood the floods his mouth and, from the way Hannibal has his head tilted, his throat. Will sneers at the tooth clamped in the pliers, blunt by Alpha standards, and drops it to the steel table next to the trashing killer. He moves to repeat the action on the right side of his mouth, his eyes flitting up to Hannibal's face of their own volition. He's seized by the primal bloodlust that has Hannibal's irises flashing red, the pleased and cruelly amused smirk that twists his lips. His eyes dart up from Wilcox to Will,

as though he can feel the gaze of his mate, and Will stares steadily into him as he grips and wrenches his wrist down once more.

He can scarcely hear the Beta's cries over the pounding of his own heart. A warm, heady buzz has begun to twist through his limbs, making them feel oddly heavy with a tingling weightlessness, and he thinks this might be what euphoria feels like. He can see how a killer could easily become addicted to this feeling. His breath catches as Hannibal releases his hold on Wilcox's jaw, levels Will with a look of curious expectancy.

"You left your marks all over them, didn't you?" he murmurs, obviously not expecting an answer from the Beta that is currently sobbing and choking on his own blood. His mind flashes to pale, lifeless limbs, mottled purple and black from the harsh, unforgiving grip of an adult's fingers. He stares at the killer's hands, now bound to the table and completely defenseless. He begins with the forefinger on the left hand, grips it with his pliers and gives a vicious twist. Wilcox howls and Will smirks. He repeats the actions on the middle finger, ring finger, pinky. When he's finishes the digits are gnarled, growing purple with bruising and pooling blood.

He brings his gaze up to Hannibal across the table, holds the pliers over Wilcox's thrashing body. "Care to do the honors?"

The Alpha accepts the tool easily, mirrors Will's judgement on the right side with no preamble. "What next, darling?" he asks, almost breathlessly, his voice low, almost unheard over the choked sobs of the Beta between them.

Will wets his dry lips, running his eyes over his prey dispassionately until he reaches his groin. A shudder of disgust rips through him as he regards the limp cock that lay there. He turns to the tray and plucks up a scalpel, drifting down to the lower portion of the table.

"He'll bleed out if you cut him there," Hannibal warns him softly.

"Doesn't matter," Will shrugs lightly, giving his head a shake. "As long as he feels it."

Wilcox's panicked wails crest again as Will seizes his testicles roughly with one hand, pulling them away from the body slightly to allow for a close cut for the scalpel. The blade sinks through the skin with ease, and Will finds himself captivated by the way the blood wells up from the broken flesh as he drags it in a smooth line, separating the sack from the groin with astonishing ease. Wilcox bucks and thrashes against his constraints, and he thinks the warbling cries issuing from his mouth might be pleas for mercy, but his ears can't seem to register the language; it feels as though they are stuffed with cotton, deaf to his prey's pleading by his own bloodlust.

There is a very small part of Will that knows he shouldn't be enjoying this as much as he is. It is easy to ignore as he loosens his grasp on the man's testicles, let them fall with a sick, wet *thunk* to the table, and gets to work freeing the monster of his cock as well.

As the rich red spills from his groin to pool onto the steel table beneath him, Wilcox's frantic thrashing grows sluggish, weak, and his desperate wails and wracking sobs subside to ragged

breaths and pitiful grunts. Will watches him a moment longer. He will die soon; Will feels absolutely no emotion over it.

He pulls his gaze up to his lover, who is still standing opposite him across the table, enraptured as he's worked. "I'm assuming this is dinner?"

Hannibal's throat works hard as he swallows, gives a sharp nod.

Will considers the twitching man on the table between them. "I've never butchered my own pig before... Will you help me?"

Hannibal lets out a breath, and Will thrills with the knowledge that watching him work has affected him so. "Of course, my love," he murmurs as he crosses around the table. He takes his place behind Will, his solid form a hard, hot line along Will's back, and reaches around him to grasp his right hand tenderly, moving it and the scalpel it holds to a point midway down Wilcox's sternum. The man's chest is moving only in shallow gasps now; Will imagines that he will die soon after the vivisection, his frail body sustaining too much blood loss.

"It takes less pressure than you would think to slice through flesh," Hannibal murmurs softly against his temple, where his mouth rests. He applies pressure to Will's hand and they both watch as the blade sinks through skin, fat, muscle, pausing only when it strikes unyielding bone. "The trick is to maintain this pressure for the entire draw. It's simple with the sternum to guide you, but once you hit the abdomen it's all too easy to dig deeper." He guides Will's hand down the length of the torso, stopping only when they reach the navel. "If you succumb to the temptation of force you could nick the bowels--trust me when I say, you truly do not want to do that."

"Then we do the Y-cuts from the clavicles, right? Before we open the cavity?" Will asks; he hasn't felt this eager to soak up knowledge in quite some time.

Hannibal rewards him with a fond brush of lips against his temple. "Exactly," he confirms, guiding Will's hand in those cuts as well.

They pull back the flesh to expose the cavity and Hannibal shows him how easy it is to crack the rib cage with brute force, and soon enough every organ of Wilcox's torso is on display for them.

"These shadows," Hannibal draws a finger over the man's lungs, still puffing and deflating ever so slightly. "He was a heavy smoker. These are no good."

"The liver looks healthy. Pink. Robust."

Hannibal hums behind him. "Good eye, darling. The liver would serve us well. Perhaps a simple dish of liver and onions, with a green bean and mushroom saute to side?"

"Sounds great," Will breathes, doing his best to quell the buzzing elation that threatens to course through him. As Hannibal is showing him where to cut to extricate the organ in question he asks, "Is there anything else worth taking?"

Hannibal hums against his temple as he works. “The kidneys perhaps, but I think our dinner has been delayed long enough. We can afford to let this sort go to waste.”

When Hannibal has finished assisting him in removing the organ and setting it aside he turns in the man’s arms, brushing his lips along a lightly stubbled jaw. “Will you display him for me?”

Another breath leaves Hannibal, the ghost of a moan on it, and he brushes his own mouth along Will’s jaw, up to press over his thirsty lips. “My love, I will do anything for you.”

He instructs Will to transport the liver up to the kitchen while he deals with the rest of the corpse--it is a corpse because at some point Wilcox’s lungs seized for the last time, his blood ceased to flow into the organs exposed to them, and Will was so busy bathing in the attention of his Alpha that he didn’t even spare a passing thought about it.

He lays out the liver on a baking sheet and begins to search the cabinets for the flour they will use to dredge the organ. He’s just finished preparing a dish with flour, salt and pepper when Hannibal joins him in the kitchen. He’s brought onions from the pantry and retrieves the fresh green beans and mushrooms from the fridge.

“We will begin with our *mise en place*,” he informs Will with all of the confidence and authority of a teacher. “The liver will only need to sear for about six minutes, so we will ensure that our sides are prepared beforehand. I will see to the beans and mushrooms if you would be so kind as to attend to the onion.”

He places a white onion on the chopping board before Will, and Will feels the immediate need to let Hannibal know that he has absolutely no idea how this is intended to be prepared. Before he can even open his mouth in protest, Hannibal is explaining, “Simple rings, halved, will serve us just fine.”

Will nods and begins to break down the onion, though about midway through his task he finds his attention pulled to Hannibal, standing a few feet away down the island, dicing up mushrooms with all the finesse of a master chef. Warmth blossoms in his gut as he watches the man’s skill with a knife, twists and coils into something much hotter as it settles someplace much more primal and intimate. He swallows hard and manages to focus his attention back to his own task, but soon after feels instinctively aware of his mate’s eyes on him. He takes another small breath and carries on, can’t risk looking at Hannibal once more right now if they truly intend to finish prepping and eating dinner tonight.

Will considers their silence for a moment, wonders if this is a good time to bring up the subject he’s been avoiding since he stood before the Ripper’s art and everything *clicked*. He’s been successful at pushing it from his mind so far, but eventually he’s going to need answers. And he’s not sure he’s going to like the ones Hannibal has to offer him.

“Say what you need to say, Will,” Hannibal suggests softly over the soft *snick* of his knife meeting the cutting board.

He huffs a breathless laugh, wondering idly if he’s just that transparent or if Hannibal just knows him that well. He lays his knife down, abandoning his task as he turns to lean against

the counter. Hannibal's gaze remains focused on his own task, though Will knows that he has the Alpha's attention.

"Why did you call Hobbs, Hannibal?"

"I was curious what would happen." The answer comes without preamble, as though that were the exact question he was expecting. Maybe he had been. It's only when Will remains silent for a long moment that Hannibal deigns to look over at him.

Will stares on. "That's it? You were just...*curious*...what he would do?"

"What he would do," Hannibal nods, turning back to his mushrooms. "What you would do."

Will wets his lips as he takes in this information. He didn't expect Hannibal to justify his actions, but he has to admit that he certainly expected a more composite reason for them. "You realize Louise and Abigail Hobbs are dead because you made that phone call." Even as he says it he wonders what the point is; Hannibal isn't going to show any remorse over that fact.

"I imagine neither woman was long for this world, in any case. Abigail Hobbs may have been spared a fate much more grim."

Will can't argue that. He can't speak as to the wife, but there was very little chance that Hobbs wouldn't have turned on his own daughter at some point. He takes a breath, lets the information settle, and then pushes it from his mind. After a moment of still silence, he returns to his onion.

"I imagined you would be more upset," Hannibal notes.

Will knows he should be, doesn't know why he's not.

"I have no interest in picking a fight with you, Hannibal," Will assures him as he finishes up, slides his cutting board down the counter to his mate. *Especially not after that ridiculously romantic thing you just did for me.* "I just wanted to know."

When they've finished prepping their ingredients they begin sauteing the mushrooms and beans in garlic and butter in one pan, while caramelizing the onions in another with a generous mixture of oil and butter. As he maintains the balance of heat on the stove, Hannibal verbally guides Will through dredging the liver in the flour, then instructs him to add it to the piping hot cast iron once he's removed the finished onions.

He tells Will to turn the liver after three minutes and then abandons him to fuck off to his cellar to find the perfect wine to pair with their dinner. Will feels sweat beading on his brow as the final seconds from his second sear tick down and he's not sure if he should remove it from the heat or plate it immediately or what but then, at last, Hannibal is there to remove the pan from heat and transfer the liver to a baking sheet to halve for the both of them.

It's only when they are sitting down to eat in the dining room that the euphoric haze of the last few hours completely dissipates and Will realizes that he is about to consume something

that *he* helped hunt, *he* helped prepare. It's a heady feeling, to slice into the liver of Emmett Wilcox and place a piece in his mouth and know as he chews that this man is serving the best purpose he could hope for by nourishing him and Hannibal, that he is dead and cooling in a freezer below his feet, and that he will never harm another boy or ruin another family ever again.

He wonders idly about Shane Simmons' reaction to the fact that they will soon find his tormentor dead, displayed. Wonders how trustworthy the boy might be, when he realizes that Wilcox has turned up dead not long after he has requested the same from Will. His instinct tells him that the boy won't say anything, would be content enough in knowing that he is safe and that his would-be abductor has paid for his sins.

"What are you thinking so deeply about, my love?" Hannibal asks him when he has consumed several bites in contemplative silence.

"Shane," Will answers easily, because he feels no need to keep these thoughts from Hannibal--even if a small part of himself is wondering if Shane Simmons himself might turn up missing or deceased if Hannibal feels the least bit threatened.

Hannibal nods as he finishes his bite of liver and onion. "I imagine the poor boy will feel quite relieved when his attacker turns out to be much less of a threat than he feared." He fixes Will with a steady, even gaze across the table.

"You don't think he'll make the connection between asking me to kill Wilcox and the Ripper displaying him a week later?"

"It's as you said, Will. The Ripper is simply annoyed with Wilcox drawing all of the focus. He left the FBI a perfectly good crime scene and they barely acknowledged him. It's only natural his next step would be to remove the object of their attention."

Will takes a sip of wine. "So you're not worried about Shane at all," he confirms, doubt coloring the statement inquisitive.

"Not at all, Will," Hannibal assures him, and just like that, Will is assured.

It is perhaps unwise to place so much blind faith in Hannibal, knowing what he does about the Alpha. And if it is...Will can't say that he much cares.

Hannibal clears his throat when they finish their meal, "I was uncertain as to what we would be preparing, so I hadn't considered a dessert…" he begins.

"I don't need dessert, Hannibal," Will assures him.

He is granted a smile at the statement. "Perhaps we could take a port in the study--"

"I would rather take you in the bedroom," Will informs him, allowing a low purr to rumble through his chest.

Hannibal's chin tilts up, his eyes flash with a hint of Alpha red at his arousal. "I think that could be arranged."

Clothing is a barrier that is removed as soon as they stumble into the master suite, all panting mouths and tearing claws. Before a coherent thought can settle, they are horizontal on the mattress, writhing against each other as they seek our their pleasure.

"*Hannibal,* " Will gasps when the Alpha grasps both of their stiff lengths in his capable hand and begins a steady stroking motion. "Oh, Alpha, *yes*," he pants, and his hips begin to jerk in time with Hannibal's strokes, urging the sensation from a tantalizing tease to full-blown bliss.

"Do you want this, Will?" Hannibal's accent is thick with arousal, his words sounding with a breathless pant. "Do you want to end like this? Or do you desire something more?"

Will keens and bucks against him at the suggestion. "*Fuck*. Can I? I want to. *Please*."

"Meilužis," Hannibal whispers reverently before gripping him tightly and rolling them until Will is astride him. "You know I could never deny you what you want," he declares with a husky rumble, spreading his legs apart for emphasis. Without warning, he slides a hand between them to plunge two fingers into Will's wet heat. He gasps in surprise at the sensation, moans as he fucks down instinctively onto Hannibal's fingers. A shock of bliss strikes through him when Hannibal crooks his fingers to tease against his prostate, and then he's whimpering as those clever fingers recede. When Will realizes that Hannibal is bringing his slick-drenched fingers down to his own hole to prepare himself, so much blood floods to his cock that a lofty, hazy version of his consciousness is concerned that he may very well pass out.

He can only lick his lips and pray to whatever powers that be that this isn't a dream as he watches Hannibal work himself open for Will. He eyes the Alpha's sizable cock, swollen and leaking against his stomach and his mouth waters at the sight, his tongue *aching* for the taste of his mate. He seizes the throbbing member with his hand and lowers his mouth, tonguing teasingly at the loose foreskin before give it a soft suck.

Hannibal groans at the action, his hips giving a soft upwards jerk, and with his grip around the shaft Will can feel more blood yet pulse into the organ. He drags his hand down in a stroke that reveals the red, dripping head and then runs his tongue along the slit. He closes his mouth around the tip, gives another soft suck as he pumps his fist and is rewarded with more of the salty fluid as well as a deep moan from the Alpha beneath him. The Alpha that is currently stretching himself with Will's slick so he can fuck him. Will's head goes hazy again with the thought and he swallows flesh with his own moan, diving down until the thick cock chokes him.

"*Will,* " Hannibal chokes himself, and Will can't help the satisfied smirk that curls his lips as he hollows his cheeks and drags back up his length. "I would love to wait until you are inside me, but if you keep--"

Will interrupts him by pulling off his his cock with a slick *pop*. Grinning up at him as he continues his languid strokes. "That good, huh?"

His lover lets out a growl, and in the space of a heartbeat he has fisted his free hand in Will's curls and is hauling the Omega's face up to his own. There is a flash of pain and more than a little surprise, but the whimper that leaves Will's throat is all arousal. Hannibal claims his mouth, gives Will's bottom lip a sharp nip that draws enough of a gasp to allow Hannibal to thrust his tongue into the wet cavern of Will's mouth.

He swallows Will's moan, does battle with his tongue until he has Will quivering with need against him. Will's own hands have come up to grip the silken strands of Hannibal's ashen hair. The both of them tighten their grasps and their mouths break apart to pant against each other. "My beautiful Omega," Hannibal growls, and a low whine slips from Will's throat. "I want you inside me, darling," he breathes, eliciting another whining keen from Will. "Do you want to mount me?"

The question nearly has Will coming before he's even gotten into the Alpha. His entire body is thrumming with needy desire, his breaths coming out so rapidly he's beginning to grow dizzy. "No," he pants, "Just like this." He arches up to capture Hannibal's lips once more, gasps again as Hannibal reaches behind him to gather more of his slick and using it to lube up Will's cock.

He settles between the Alpha's legs, pushing them open further to make room and hauling them up so that his knees are bent, feet flat on the bed. He finds himself biting his lip fiercely as he aligns himself with Hannibal's slick hole, holding his breath as he begins to push inside. He moves slowly, but it's less out of consideration for his mate and more for the fact that if any more stimulation wracks his overwrought body this is all going to be over far too soon. His eyes slip shut as Hannibal's heat envelopes him, his breath is only released when his hips meet Hannibal's thighs.

When he opens his eyes, he's completely struck by the sight laid out before him. Hannibal's own eyes are closed, his breath shallow; there's a thin sheen of sweat glistening across the planes of his abdomen, his chest. Will realizes that he's gripping Hannibal's thighs so tightly that his blunt nails are digging in, threatening to break skin, and Will lets out a quiet, displeased sound, loosening his grasp and soothing the skin with gentle pets.

Hannibal opens his eyes, warm amber nearly completely taken over by Alpha red, gives him a soft smile. "It's alright, darling." He shifts his hips and Will groans at the friction. "Move for me, Will."

Will pulls out at the request, pushes back in slowly with a low moan. "*Fuck,* Hannibal, you--" Again. "Oh, *God*, you feel so fucking good." He has been with a few Alphas before, but *never* like this. He's fucked a handful of women but this...Hannibal is tighter, hotter, more intoxicating that anything Will has ever experienced. "I just--*fuck*," Will slides his arms under Hannibal's knees, presses forward again, this time leaning his body over Hannibal's to force his legs up higher. The new angle pulls a low moan from Hannibal, and it's all the encouragement Will needs.

He drops his face to Hannibal's neck, breathing him in and lapping at his sweat, his scent glands as he quickens the pace of his hips. "Thank you, thank you," he murmurs a weak chant against Hannibal's skin, his thrusts going frantic as a familiar heat twists and builds in his gut. "*Hannibal*, my Alpha, my perfect mate," he babbles; the coil is tightening,

threatening to snap at any moment. Hannibal's grunts and groans of appreciation have only spurred him on all the faster.

"*Yes*," he moans, and his hands raise to tangle tightly into Will's curls, holding his mouth against his flesh. "My darling Will, come for me, love."

Will whines. His teeth *itch*. All at once he wonders why the hell he's waiting to bond with Hannibal; wonders why he hasn't claimed this man as his own yet. "Hann--I can't--I *need* to--" a snarling growl of frustration rips from his throat and he gives in to his baser urges, ripping his face away from Hannibal's neck to sink his teeth into the hard curve of his shoulder.

He couldn't say if it's the rawness of the primal gesture, the blooming copper that fills his mouth, or Hannibal's ecstatic cry as he spasms around Will's cock that does him in, but with one more rough thrust in Will stills, spills his release into Hannibal's scalding hole. Their movements still as they attempt to collect themselves, heaving gasps for air turning to satisfied pants, pounding hearts gradually slowing. Will licks his lips and when the copper floods his tongue once more he pulls back to survey the damage done to Hannibal's flesh.

He gives a low whine of dismay, striping soothing, apologetic licks across the wound, alternating in gentle nuzzles and kisses.

"No, darling. No," Hannibal's voice is raspy with satisfaction, but warm with affection and reassurance. He wraps a large, warm hand around Will's jaw and skull, guiding his lips from his shoulder to his own. "You did nothing wrong, love," he presses their lips together, petting through Will's sweaty curls.

"I hurt you," Will squeaks out against his lips, and Hannibal surprises him by tipping his head back and letting out a hearty laugh.

He strokes his thumb through the stubble of Will's cheek softly, pulls their lips together once more. "No, sweet thing. You were perfect." He tilts Will's face up, laps at the blood that has stained his chin.

Will pulls out of Hannibal then, shifting up the mattress to climb into his mate's lap and nuzzle into his chest; the Alpha's release has coated his stomach and chest but Will presses close regardless, letting the seed stain and mark him. Hannibal tucks Will's head under his chin, his hands running along Will's sides and back as the Omega lets loose a contented purr.

"I will bear your mark with pride, darling boy," Hannibal murmurs into Will's hair.

Will releases a soft sigh. "I love you," he whispers into Hannibal's chest. When the hands that stroke his back pause momentarily, Will tips his head up to meet the Alpha's wide stare. "I love you, Hannibal," he murmurs again, his breath catching at the shock on his lover's face. Was that too soon?

"Oh, Will," Hannibal murmurs, moves one of his hands to guide Will's lips home. "Wonderful Will. I love you, darling." He brushes their lips together as he speaks, tilts his head to place soft kisses along Will's jawline, down as much of his neck as he can reach. He

guides Will's head back down to his furred chest, resumes the soothing strokes through his curls and down his back. At some point, he reaches down to draw the sheets up around them.

"Bonding mark or not," he breathes into Will's hair as the empath is drifting to sleep. "I am yours."

Will's eyes feel heavy, he gives a sigh, but can't seem to summon the energy to return the sentiment. He has a feeling that Hannibal knows, regardless.

The Ripper strings up Emmett Wilcox in a web of ropes; the fly caught up in his own web as he pretends to be a spider. His neck is bared in submission, angry gouges slashed into the spot where his scent glands would be, if Betas had any. His eyes have been plucked out, replaced with two gorgeous blooms of yellow hyacinth, his mouth open in an unending cry of agony to display his lack of fangs.

The torso has been mostly cleared out, overflows with blossoms of balsamine, foxglove and yellow carnations. The only organ that remains is the heart, suspended in place by a net of woven flowers, the petals white with red tips so shockingly bright that Will thought they had been dipped in blood until he got a closer look.

It is the most beautiful display he's ever seen. And, knowing what he knows now, it's all the more beautiful for the familiarity that shines through only to him.

"*Someone* wasn't happy with a Beta running around acting like an Alpha."

Will resists the urge to roll his eyes. It seems to him that Zeller exists for two reasons: to state the obvious and, more commonly, to state the incorrect.

"What makes you say that?" Price rejoins, doesn't give Zeller the opportunity to eat his own foot by replying to a rhetorical question. "*Alright* kids, today in Botany 101 we've got...yellow carnations for rejection, yellow hyacinth for jealousy, foxglove for insecurity. Balsamine? Anyone?"

Will clears his throat. "Impatience," he answers, to Price's surprised approval. Will shoots him a sly grin. "I did a bit of research after the last one. What's he wrapped the heart in?" He steps closer to peer up, though it's difficult to get a good look with the body suspended ten feet up the way it is.

"Striped carnations. Refusal," a low voice at his side provides. Will turns to Bev with a quirked eyebrow. "I had to send some, once." Will's other eyebrow joins the first and Bev turns away to hide a cheeky grin. "He was being a shit."

"My, it sure is nice to be back on a case of good old-fashioned mutilation," Price's tone is wistful and quickly earns a disapproving glare from Jack.

Will understands the sentiment--the air simply feels lighter, everyone more at ease now that there isn't a child in the equation. He has a feeling he may not be the only one at the scene

that feels a perverse sense of justice has been executed.

“This is two,” Jack grunts at Will’s side. “Think his pattern will hold now that he’s taken out Wilcox?”

Will wants to tell Jack that he hasn’t got a good goddamn clue what the Ripper will or won’t do. He’s just as likely to hold to the pattern of a sounder three as he is to break it. The Ripper is entirely unpredictable; even knowing the face behind the name doesn’t give Will any insight into what Hannibal has planned.

He holds his sharp tongue, takes a deep, slow breath as he gazes up at his gift. “Time will tell,” he murmurs softly. For once, Jack let’s it rest at that.

Chapter End Notes

meilužis - Lithuanian term of endearment for lover

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

In this chapter: Lots of sex. Like, an obscene amount. Almost 50%. Also grand romantic gestures and the long-awaited bonding.

Chapter Notes

Well. This was a ride. I'm pleased to report that despite the semi-foreign aspects of ABO I had a complete blast writing this. I have to thank everyone for your encouragement, whether it be via comments, kudos or you silent subscribers (yes, I obsessively watched those numbers grow!). I truly hope you've enjoyed reading as much as I've enjoyed writing for you, and hope that this last chapter lives up to all of your expectations!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Six weeks later

There was a period of adjustment there, for a little bit, wherein Will was slightly concerned that he would be ruled by his primitive Omega instincts for the rest of his life. Even having been on suppressants for nigh on a decade, Will can't remember ever feeling everything so fiercely; pride and shame, the thrill of an Alpha's protection and support. He was greatly relieved when those base urges began to soften around the edges, eventually fell to the backdrop. He still feels an obscene amount of pride when Hannibal compliments him. He still feels an overwhelming gratitude and sense of security when Hannibal provides for him, be it food, affection, or just a space in which to be himself entirely. But those instincts no longer drive his every action, no longer sit at the forefront of his mind when he makes a decision about something.

As it turns out, he had no need for his Omega brain in order to make a decision about Hannibal Lecter.

He knows he was smart to wait, to see if things changed when his hormones balanced out. If anything, his affection for and devotion to Hannibal has only grown over the last weeks. It leaves Will with a warm, settled feeling in his core, something beyond primitive need letting him know that he is making the right decision.

He had begun searching out homes for his pack weeks ago. Hannibal made it clear, when he gifted Will a key to his house, that he may move in whatever he liked to ensure he was comfortable there--even made passing comments about there being enough space in the

garden for a sheltered kennel. Will would take him up on moving in without a second thought, were it not for his pack. Apart from the obvious advantage of being near his mate 24/7, Baltimore is a much more convenient place to commute from than Wolf Trap. But Will had decided, even with that first comment of a kennel, that he couldn't possibly ask Hannibal to deal with adjusting to living with a mate as well as seven canines. Two, perhaps, he will keep. The rest need new homes.

He's done well in the last couple weeks; three of his pack have already been placed with new homes. It may take time to finish out this secondary mission, but he is doggedly determined to see through his main objective.

Before the week is out, he will be bonded to Hannibal Lecter.

He knows that if a mating bite was all he sought he could accomplish his goal this very evening--knows that the Alpha would be more than willing. But Hannibal has always been poetic, a romanticist at heart. Will wouldn't dream of passing up the opportunity for a grand, romantic gesture to please the Alpha. He has had a plan in mind for several weeks now, has done everything he can in that time to see about making that plan a reality.

He's ready--as ready as a fledgling bird ever is to leave the nest and fly on his own.

He's done the research, the surveillance. It's time to act.

He is surprised--and not--to find that, just as Hannibal noted in an intimate conversation several weeks previous, Will's heart rate does not quicken as he works.

Hannibal is in the study when Will gets in, tucked into a corner of the couch with a book in his lap. Amber eyes dart up to greet him as he crosses into the room and fill with a warmth that still makes Will feel weak in the knees.

"Good evening, darling," he greets as Will crosses over to him. "How was the lecture?"

Will gives a disinterested grunt as he climbs onto the sofa, sprawls himself over his lover and makes himself a place there with all the grace of one of his dogs. When he's finally settled in, curled up into the warmth of his side with Hannibal's arm wrapped around him, he lets out a heavy breath. "Long. Boring. Sorry I missed dinner," he tilts his head up at that to peer at the Alpha, and Hannibal gives him a soft smile and brushes their lips together.

"I knew not to expect you. But I did miss your presence all the same."

"I really can't stay late," Will sighs. "I have a prospective adoption coming over first thing tomorrow." Hannibal lets out a discontented hum at that but strokes lovingly through Will curls all the same. "I just really wanted to see you once today," he snuggles in a bit closer, resting his head on Hannibal's chest so he can feel the steady pumping of his lover's heart. "Read to me."

He doesn't need to see his face, can hear the smile in Hannibal's voice. "You don't even know what I'm reading. It could be dreadfully boring."

Will jerks his shoulders in a lazy shrug. "Doesn't matter, if it's you reading it." He does tilt his face up then, to steal another soft kiss. "Please. I've missed your voice all day."

Hannibal pets through his hair again, settles Will's head back down to his warm chest. "It's poetry, as it turns out. Pablo Neruda. Would you prefer the Spanish or English version?"

Will gives him a swift poke in the side in answer and Hannibal huffs a breath of amusement, clears his throat.

"I do not love you as if you were salt-rose or topaz,
or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off.
I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,
in secret, between the shadow and the soul.

I love you as the plant that never blooms
but carries in itself the light of hidden flowers;
thanks to your love a certain solid fragrance,
risen from the earth, lives darkly in my body.

I love you without knowing how, or when, or from where.
I love you straightforwardly, without complexities or pride;
so I love you because I know no other way

than this: where I does not exist, nor you,
so close that your hand on my chest is my hand,
so close that your eyes close as I fall asleep."

They sit in silence for a moment, a heaviness that is affection and arousal and something altogether deeper smothering them completely, pressing heavy on their chests so that breaths are short, shallow.

And then Will moves, pulling the book from Hannibal's hands and tossing it to the other end of the sofa, climbing into his lap and fisting his hands fiercely in soft, sandy locks to force Hannibal's mouth to his own. As though he needs to force him. As though Hannibal wishes his mouth to be any other place.

He nips at Hannibal's lips until he's granted (swift) entrance, thrusts his tongue in to taste and claim his mate. Hannibal's own hands have found Will's body, simultaneously hold him close and begin stripping him of his shirt.

"That's the most romantic shit I've ever heard," he pants against his lover's mouth. "Though I'm still not sure if it's the source material or the medium," he grinds his hips down into

Hannibal's, drops his head back with a moan that stretches even further as the Alpha takes instant advantage of the open skin and begins sucking wet kisses down the column of his throat. "*Fuck,* I *really* can't stay," he groans, whimpers as he rocks their hips together once more and feels Hannibal's arousal as evident as his own. "Don't let me fall asleep, after."

His lover nods, captures his mouth in a heated kiss once more and surges forward to stand. Will can do little more than wrap himself around the Alpha's solid body and trust that he will be safe. He knows that he is; Hannibal has yet to let him fall. He takes the opportunity, while he's being transported upstairs, to nuzzle freely into the Alpha's neck, sucking in skin and scent alike, nipping sharply at every inch of flesh allowed to him save the one spot he truly wishes to sink his fangs into.

Soon. He thinks, and then immediately reels at the concept. Soon they will be bonded, mated. United. Forever. And Hannibal doesn't even know. A low whine slips from Will's chest at the thought. Hannibal will be so pleased when he finds out that Will has finally made up his mind; has finally stopped holding out for something to change it.

He's being laid out across the bed, divested of clothing, before he even realizes that they've reached their destination. He brings his own hands up to work at the endless layers that separate him from his mate's skin, doing his very best to remain civil rather than tearing apart the offending articles. He knows how much pride Hannibal takes in his wardrobe, and while they have experienced a casualty or two in the last few months, Will tries his best to respect his Alpha's belongings and exercises, what he feels is, a monumental level of patience and care.

And the patience required *is* excessive; Hannibal is keen on wrapping himself in as many expensive layers as he can comfortably wear, it seems. On the few occasions that he has shocked Will with a more informal ensemble of trousers and a sweater, he has found himself divested of clothing all the faster.

"Hannibal," Will pants beneath him as their bare bodies writhe together. "*Alpha,*" he moans. "How do you want me?"

"Just like this, mylimasis," Hannibal breathes against his mouth and Will lets out a whimper. He absolutely loves the foreign terms of endearment that Hannibal whispers to him; he has considered more than once taking a stab at learning some Lithuanian. Hannibal shifts above him to bring a hand down to his entrance, already dripping with slick from the moment the doctor read that damn poem. He slips two fingers in with no preamble, thrusting in a few times before curving his attention to a more sensitive spot. "I want to witness you falling apart beneath me. *Because* of me."

Will keens beneath him, arcs his body up to seek more; more contact, more heat, more stimulation. "*Oh,*" he whimpers, jerking his hips with a graceless, staccato need. "Oh, *fuck*."

When Hannibal dips down the bed to add his tongue to the equation, striping hot and wet up his length before lapping at the head and sucking him down completely, Will loses all vocabulary to a pitiful whine of desire. Hannibal has him panting, eyes squeezed shut and hands clenched white-knuckled in the sheets before he finally pulls his mouth away to shift attention to Will's nipples.

“Hann--” another desperate whine as teeth brush across his pebbled nipple. “Hannib--” a gasp as his prostate is stroked.

A sultry chuckle leaves his lover’s throat as he continues his teasing ministrations, bends his head down to suck and nip at Will’s throat and shoulder. “Just tell me what you want, darling,” Hannibal instructs, as though he’s not doing everything in his power to make that quite impossible for Will.

“You know what I want,” Will growls back, letting the hands that have gripped at the sheets turn to Hannibal’s torso instead, turn to claws to dig in relentlessly. “You. Inside me.” He draws his claws down sharply, sinks his nails in even deeper when he reaches Hannibal’s hips, so that tangy copper pierces the air between them and they both let out a moan.

He loves this the most; that Hannibal thrills at his sweet Omega turning vicious and drawing blood, leaving marks along his neck and torso to stake his claim. It’s less common for an Omega to place a mating bite on an Alpha’s neck, but Will knows all the same that Hannibal longs for him to; longs for him to claim him, officially, to make him his own. And Will knows that he will, when the time comes. Hannibal will not emerge from this bonding without a fair few marks of his own.

Nor this mating, it seems, as Will, overcome with lust and stimulation, locks into Hannibal’s shoulder with insatiable fangs; refusing to let go until the ache to feel his Alpha within him is satisfied.

As luck would have it, Hannibal, for all his pomp and circumstance, needs very little *actual* encouragement to move proceedings along. He removes his fingers from Will’s slick hole and replaces them nearly instantaneously with his thick, solid cock, pushing against him, forcing himself in, not slowing or stopping until he is home, as deep inside Will as he can physically achieve. He stills then, sinking down to press against Will but careful to maintain supporting his own weight. He gives Will’s full bottom lip a soft suck before licking into his mouth, a deep purr rumbling through his chest as he tastes his own blood on his mate’s tongue.

He pulls back to gaze down at him, and Will is certain that no one in the world could ever look at him the way Hannibal does. His eyes, so often closed-off and guarded, open only to Will, are warm amber and fond. And reverent. Will feels like he’s being worshiped and the gentle hand that raises to brush his wild curls off of his face only intensifies the feeling. He dips down to meld their lips together again, soft and unhurried. And then, finally, with an aching tenderness that makes Will’s eyes sting with the threat of tears, Hannibal begins to move within him.

It is the complete opposite of how this encounter began--frenzied, urgent, desperate--but it’s perfect all the same. It’s always perfect with Hannibal. Will wraps his legs around his lover, locking his ankles together where they rest against his low back, and uses the leverage to urge Hannibal deeper, rocking his own hips up to meet him with each steady thrust. The gentle movements set a low burn in Will’s gut and the build is maddeningly slow, a tease to the blaze of desire that scorches through him when his mate claims him hard and fast. Will lets out a low whine, tamping down the instinct to urge him for more, letting Hannibal set the pace, as he so often allows Will.

He must sense that the slow roll of his hips is not enough--he seems to know Will's body even better that the Omega does some days--for his lips pull up in a knowing smirk and as he buries his face to nuzzle into the crook of Will's neck he slides a hand between them, wrapping a firm grasp around his aching cock. Will bucks into the new touch with a gasp and an encouraging purr, tilting his head aside to allow his mate better access to his neck.

As Hannibal licks and sucks at his racing pulse, nibbles gently on the lobe of his ear, nuzzles into the curls that border his scent gland, Will wants to tell him to just do it--just bite him, bond him--because if he wasn't sure before he knows now, unequivocally, that no one will ever love him the way that Hannibal does. It would be the perfect time to bond, when their joining is tender, when movements and voices and words are soft, loving.

But that is not Will's design. Will needs him to *see* first. See just how much Hannibal means to him; how far he will go to show it.

Soon. He thinks again, And it's that thought that has that slow burn in his gut catch, flame brighter, and when Hannibal speaks--almost as though he knows it's exactly what Will needs--when he breathes against the sweat-glistening skin of Will's neck that he's lovely, that he's perfect, that he's *his,* Will comes.

Hannibal holds him tight and twists them as he sinks his knot into him so that Will is on top, can curl up into Hannibal's warm, hairy chest to wait out the knotting just as he likes to. Will shivers as he feels his mate empty into him, breathes a soft, contented sigh as Hannibal begins the familiar action of carding his fingers through Will's sweat-damp curls.

He buries his nose in the locks and takes another slow, deep breath. "You are nearing heat again, darling," Hannibal informs him.

Will nods sluggishly and gives a lazy hum. "Doctor said there might be up to three in the first six months after the suppressants, while my body adjusts." They lay lax and sated with each other for a moment before Will pulls his head back to peer up at his lover. "Just because I'm in love now doesn't mean I've changed my mind about pups," he warns with a smirk.

Hannibal grants him a warm chuckle, the hand in his locks trailing down to his chin to guide their lips together. "Of course, darling."

Will settles back in to wait for Hannibal's knot to deflate, and it's not long before their breaths and hearts have fallen into a steady, peaceful rhythm together. Will's eyes are just beginning to grow heavy when Hannibal reminds him not to fall asleep. Will nods lazily against his lover's chest, murmuring something vague about fifteen minutes.

Somehow, with his mate, that short span of time seems to stretch on and end abruptly all at once. Hannibal, reliable as ever, makes sure that Will gets up and out in a reasonable amount of time, sending him off with a travel thermos of steaming coffee. He's reluctant to go, but knows that it's necessary. If he wants to keep to his timeline he's going to need to work for the remainder of the evening. The prospect of his end goal and his mate's gourmet coffee is enough to get him through.

Will gives a muffled, sleep-deprived moan as his phone begins to ring just hours after he's made it to bed. He considers for a brief moment ignoring it completely, remembers that if Jack sends someone around in person his whole plan is for naught. He reaches out to feel blindly for the offending object without lifting his head from it's buried position half-beneath his pillow. He's so goddamn tired he doesn't even need to feign illness in his voice when he answers.

"'Lo?"

"Will," it's Jack, predictably, if not a few hours ahead of schedule. "We've got a scene out in Eldersburg."

"Jack," Will grunts; the Alpha doesn't seem to hear him.

"It's...we aren't exactly sure but it looks like the Ripper."

"Jack," Will states again. "I can't, I'm sorry. I have...some kind of stomach flu or...something. I don't know. But unless the scene is within ten feet of my toilet I don't think I'm viewing anything today." He waits for the inevitable impatient huff to reach him over the line. *No, don't worry, Jack, I'll be perfectly fine. Thank you for your concern.* The fact that it's a made-up malady does little to staunch his annoyance at Jack's selfishness. "Listen, call Hannibal. He's free today. He can go look, bring me the pictures when you guys have them."

"Alright. I wish you could see it yourself, we both know you work better when you do, but--"

"Look--Jack--I really need to go now. Sorry again," Will pushes a frantic urgency into his tone as though he's lurching for the toilet bowl as they speak and then ends the call before Jack has a chance to respond.

Prick. He thinks viciously. But step one is complete. He only needs to hope that Hannibal is willing to accommodate Jack, that he won't mention that Will seemed just fine when he left his presence just ten hours before. And that he won't be so concerned for Will that he blows off Jack and the crime scene entirely to come to Wolf Trap instead.

He reminds himself that his mate is an incredibly intelligent creature as he gives his limbs a languid stretch. He really could have done with a few more hours of sleep, but there's no time for rest now. Hannibal is closer to the scene than Will is to Baltimore, and he's going to need to move with haste if he hopes to be ready by the time his mate returns home.

Despite the fact that Hannibal is certain he would have been able to catch the scent of illness on Will the previous evening had something truly been building within him, the Alpha finds it difficult to ignore the claims from Jack of his mate being too sick to visit a crime scene. He recalls Will telling him about a potential adoptive family coming by that morning to look at one of the dogs, and how worn out he has been from various special lectures that he was forced to attend at the Academy throughout the week. Still, it seems unlike Will to blow off a crime scene, especially one that has been tentatively deemed one of the Ripper's when Will knows that he himself has been too busy to work that week.

All the same, he finds himself denying his protective Alpha instincts to drive out to Wolf Trap, travelling instead in the opposite direction to visit Liberty Reservoir.

The area is beautiful, even in the dead of winter. There is only a light dusting of snow on the frozen ground, despite them being more than a week into December, but the flurries that arrived overnight have coated the trees with a thin, even layer of white that is enchanting to view in the mid-morning sun. He had parked with the rest of the FBI vehicles in the designated lot and was lead on foot through the twisting trails along the waterfront to the scene by some unnamed deputy.

When their route reached the final curve and Hannibal could see before him the crime scene--this scene supposedly deemed as one of his own--littered with the familiar faces of the BAU team, Hannibal's breath catches in his chest. He lets it out slowly, a puff of white fog flowing from his mouth in the chilled air, and steps closer.

Agent Katz offers him a pair of latex gloves, which he accepts with a small murmur of thanks, pulling them on as he circles the bodies placed before him.

Two males: one Alpha, one Omega, on their knees before each other; both of their torsos have been opened to showcase their workings within. Everything seems in place except for their hearts, which are each cupped within a palm. The Alpha is cradling the heart in his hands close to his open chest, while the Omega in front of him has his fangs embedded deeply into the heart in his own hand, forever frozen as he consumes the organ. It doesn't take Hannibal long to work out that they are each likely in possession of the other's heart.

He crouches down on his haunches to peer closer into the bodies. All of the organs seem to be accounted for, but it is quite evident that they have been messed with regardless. Cut out and then replaced. He wagers that each man holds half of the other's insides within him. They are connected, two beings merged into one. A quick glance to their necks shows that they are bonded. Completely connected, then. Hannibal wets his lips in contemplation, head cocked as he takes in every aspect, commits it to the newest wing of his Memory Palace.

He wonders idly how Will chose them.

He straightens then, glances around the scene. There is enough casual movement to denote that no footprints from the creator had been evident when the team arrived on-site. The corpses each have spots of white in their hair that the wind has yet to blow away. The snow came after, then.

Good boy. He thinks, swallowing back a pleased purr. He is certain that Will was aware the weather would prove useful to covering his tracks. So many emotions surge through Hannibal, more than he's felt all at once in decades: pride, affection, curiosity, satisfaction. Above it all an undying, undeniable love for his beautiful Omega. He feels truly honored to have been blessed with a courting gift of his own, a faint flicker of hope sparking deep within him that it may even be *more* than a courting gift, considering the mated status of the hosts.

With a discipline granted to him from decades of masking his emotions, Hannibal swallows this all back and turns to Jack, who has been waiting (uncharacteristically) patiently behind him. He gives a dejected sigh. "It certainly *looks* like the Ripper, but it lacks the expected

quality. The Ripper mutilates his victims with surgical precision. What was done here...” he gestures vaguely to the bodies behind him with a shake of his head, “This is the work of an amateur; a fledgling killer. A pale imitation of the Ripper...it is unclear whether he is seeking to replace the Ripper or flatter him,” the lie comes easily to Hannibal; they always have.

Jack heaves a sigh, turning his gaze to the heavens briefly and then glaring at the ground as though to berate the Devil himself for sending his evil unto Jack Crawford’s domain. “Will they never stop? And why the hell are they always in the tri-state area?”

Hannibal has to fight back a smirk. “I’m sorry, Jack, I haven’t got an answer for that. Though I would be happy to deliver some photos to Will when he is feeling better.”

Jack gives him a warm smile. “I would appreciate that. I hope he’s feeling better soon. And thank you, Dr. Lecter, for your help today.”

It’s a warm smile that Hannibal returns, genuine. “It was my pleasure,” he responds as he turns to walk away from the scene. It’s the most honest thing he’s said all morning.

As soon as Hannibal crosses the threshold he knows that Will is home. The first sense that awakens his awareness is the smell, stronger than a simple lingering scent and laden with pheromones and arousal. As he becomes aware of this he also sees the slip of paper that has been left on the counter nearest the door to the attached garage. Hannibal drifts over to it, head tilted in curiosity.

Welcome home, myliu,

I hope you enjoyed your gift. If you did then your instructions are simple:

Find me.
Mate me.
Bond me.

Hannibal’s breath catches as the words register, that spark of hope he’d felt at the crime scene igniting into an all-consuming blaze. At the same time his predatory sense flares to life, his hindbrain recognizing from the message that the hunt is on. He slips off his shoes and suit jacket to minimize the sound his movement will generate.

His jaw parts instinctively as he scents the air, hoping to catch the strongest scent of his mate to follow. Immediately he’s drowning in the intoxicating scent of Will’s slick. His feet are moving before he’s conscious of it, his cock thickening at the scent of his mate’s arousal as he follows it to the sitting room. A low growl pulls from his chest when he reaches the area and finds it empty, the majority of the scent emanating from the couch that has been deliberately marked with slick.

He returns to the main hall, his higher functions powering down seemingly automatically as he hyper-focuses on scent and sound. He closes his eyes and lets that deeper part of him pull, the part that he knows is connected to Will regardless of being physically bonded.

Upstairs.

He makes his way up the steps slowly, cautious of the spots he knows will creak with his weight. When he reaches the second floor he scents the air again, makes his way to the master bedroom even though he knows it will likely be another ploy. He should be searching each room methodically as he goes, the logical bit of him argues, but the scent of Will is so *strong,* just pulling him along like a blasted dog on a leash. As soon as he pushes the door open he knows that he's fallen for the trap, can hear abrupt movement down the hall, steps pounding frantically down the stairs.

Hannibal gives chase.

His legs are longer than Will's, and as an Alpha he's faster regardless, so though his mate has a head start on him they reach the bottom of the staircase nearly simultaneously. Will lets out a delicious moan as Hannibal's claws trap him. He's not struggling so much that he needs to take him to the ground, so it is a simple matter of plucking his mate up and swinging him over his shoulder in a fireman's carry as he hustles back up the stairs.

He becomes vaguely aware that he's emitting a low, constant purr of arousal and dominance when Will lets out a needy whine and squirms in his grasp as another fresh gush of slick invades Hannibal's senses. He jerks up the shoulder supporting his mate in an attempt to jostle him into submission. His lovely Omega gives a fierce hiss and sinks his claws into Hannibal's back in response. The Alpha can only chuckle at his feisty mate as they enter the master bedroom and he throws Will onto the mattress.

He's on him before Will can even right himself into a sitting position, tearing at his clothes--sweatpants and a t-shirt, Hannibal somehow notes; clothing that was meant to be disposable--and only once Will is bare to him does he focus on removing his own layers. Will surges forward to assist and the predatory hindbrain that has controlled Hannibal since he arrived home balks at the action, fisting one demanding hand in Will's soft curls to hold him in place while he works at his clothing with one hand.

It takes longer that way, but there is the added benefit of Will panting and writhing at the show of dominance, a beautiful, needy whine erupting from his throat. When he's loosened most of his clothing he releases his mate to strip out of them quickly; by the time he's sinking into the mattress on his knees, Will has taken the initiative to turn over and sink down to his elbows with his hindquarters in the air. It's possibly the most beautiful presentation Hannibal has ever seen, but it simply won't do. Not for this.

"No," he states, surprised to find that his voice is no more than a gruff rasp. He grips Will's lovely hips and with a firm hand guides him to turn over. His beautiful Omega blinks up at him with wary confusion.

"You can still bond me this way," he says, and he's not wrong; Hannibal could mount him from behind, take him and still lean forward to sink his teeth into willing flesh...but that's not all he wants.

"I can," he agrees, "but you can't."

Another perfectly needy whine is tugged from Will's chest at the words, the implication, and the Omega falls pliant beneath him on his back, spreading his legs wide dutifully to allow him space. Hannibal settles between his thighs, looping his arms under Will's bent knees to ruck them up even further as he aligns his throbbing cock with that wonderfully slick hole and slides home.

He figures Will had prepared himself earlier, considering the lure of slick he'd placed throughout their home; Hannibal thrusts forward without hesitation regardless, knowing his lovely Omega would appreciate the sensation all the more if his hole proved to still be too tight. He's *always* tight, even after Hannibal has taken time to work him open with fingers and tongue; it's one of those things that always has him baffled over what a marvel his mate is.

They both groan at the sensation of Hannibal settling in, and he takes little time for either of them to adjust to it before he pulls out and thrusts forth again, again. Each time a bit more fiercely, pausing inside him just a bit longer. Part of him thinks he may be able to live in a stasis of this moment for eternity; forever caught between sliding into his lover and being encompassed by him completely.

But then Will is panting and moaning beneath him, desperate, *begging,* for more, and Hannibal has known for some time now that he could never hope to deny his mate. His lovely, perfect, wonderful Will.

He lunges forward with a fierce growl, stretching the legs in his grasp until his needy Omega is near bent in half, their chests brushing together with each frantic thrust of Hannibal's cock. Will makes use of his free hands by tangling them into Hannibal's hair and forcing their mouths together in a bruising, biting, breathless kiss. They work their tongues together, near in time with Hannibal's thrusts, until they are simply panting into each other's mouths.

"Fuck--Hannibal, *please,* " Will whines breathlessly. "Please bond me. I need you, I need--" he breaks off with another intoxicating cry. "Goddamnit, Hannibal, I don't want to spend another minute not connected to you, *please--"*

The Alpha lets out a growl that is both predatory and triumphant at the plea, releasing his hold on the Omega's legs (Will is quick to wrap them around his torso tightly) and wrapping one hand beneath his shoulders to hold him closer still. The other comes up to fist into downy curls, ripping his head to the side and surging forward to sink his teeth into the vulnerable, willing flesh of Will's neck. Almost poetically, and without intention, Hannibal's knot forces itself into his Omega's hole just as his fangs sink into his scent glands; he locks on as Will cries out and comes between them, clenching his jaw fiercely to state officially the claim he has felt on his mate for months.

He's filled with a heady mix of his mate's blood--somehow sweeter than any he's ever tasted--and his pheromones. He's not sure how to describe the sensation of bonding; it's almost as though a part of himself has been hollowed out and filled completely with *Will* which, he wagers, must be the greatest feeling on this earth. It's almost as though he has a groundline straight into the Omega's emotions--he can feel his need, his passion, his love, his ecstasy--a vague echo of the intensity he'd feel himself but there all the same. Beyond it all he's vaguely

aware that he's spilling his seed deep into his Omega, marking him further, and can sense Will's immense satisfaction at the sensation.

With what might be the greatest discipline he's ever exacted on himself, Hannibal releases his fangs from his mate's neck, fists the hand in his curls even tighter as he guides the Omega's mouth to his own throat.

Will needs little encouragement beyond that. He surges forth to sink his fangs into Hannibal's own gland, emptying his release between them for the second time in minutes; another surge of Hannibal's seed is emptied into his mate as he clenches around his knot. He works himself in deep, his fierce little Omega, making sure that the claim to his Alpha will scar so that everyone must bear witness to the fact that Hannibal belongs to *him.*

When they've both begun to wind down from their orgasms they stripe soothing licks across their bonding marks, occasionally breaking away from the area to nuzzle together and exchange tender kisses to blood-stained lips.

"I love you," Will breathes against him at one point, and Hannibal's chest hitches so fiercely he can scarcely breathe for a moment.

"Will," he breathes across a low moan, "I love you, Will. Sweet, wonderful Will…" His knot has deflated enough that he can pull free, though he does little more than that and settles more comfortably over his Omega. He brings a hand up to cradle Will's stubbled cheek while the other is pulled into the all-familiar action of stroking through soft curls. "You left me the most perfect gift; I adored it."

Beneath him Will preens at the praise, a pleased purr vibrating through his chest.

They gaze at each other and Hannibal marvels at the undeniable feeling of *home* when he looks into Will's eyes. It is a feeling he was certain had been lost to him forever a lifetime ago; a time so long past that he had not mourned the inevitability of solitude for decades, but had come to expect it, take strength in it.

And then, Will.

He twists them onto their sides and their limbs tangle together as their lips meet once more. Though it's only mid-afternoon, not for the first time, they fall asleep while exchanging lazy kisses.

There are no nightmares, no alarms blaring or cell phones ringing off; nothing that should drag a person from a peaceful slumber to the harsh, sudden shift of being awake. It's an instinctual calling, not outside stimuli, that wrenches Will's lids open, his mind fully cognizant instead of slow and sleepy as he should be. A distinct awareness that his mate is pulling away from him and Will won't have it.

A displeased whine slips from his throat as his hand strikes out to ensnare Hannibal's wrist. "Stay," he insists.

Hannibal, his mate, his Alpha, still groggy and sleep-tousled himself, grants Will a soft smile. “I’m only going to prepare us dinner, darling.”

Will gives him another insistent tug, not bothering to hide his scowl. “Stay,” he repeats, and Hannibal relents to the pitiful, needy thing in his voice, settling back down onto the mattress. Will immediately shifts closer to splay across his chest to make sure he stays put.

He can feel more than hear the low chuckle that rumbles through Hannibal’s chest, and then his arms are encircling him and shifting their bodies. Will gives another squeak of protest until he realizes that Hannibal is only turning them to cuddle properly, his strong arms ensuring that his Omega stays locked against him, back to chest. Will settles against him, perfectly content for the first time since he was roused from slumber. He gives a soft sigh as his Alpha’s lips trail across the nape of his neck, find home as they reach his bonding mark, still raw and painful and perfect.

“I can feel you,” Will whispers; his eyes slip shut and he swallows a groan as Hannibal’s wet tongue traces the outline of his bite.

“We are one, now,” Hannibal agrees, and hot breath fanning across his neck *does* pull out a groan. Well, the sensation on his neck is mostly the cause; the thickening cock he can feel stirring against his backside is certainly not hindering things. Will rolls his hips back instinctively, drawing a moan of his own from his Alpha. A delicious shock of warmth clenches in his gut as he registers that layered just below his own arousal is Hannibal’s desire as well.

As he wiggles back he can feel that he is already wet with slick, and by Hannibal’s arrested breath he can tell that his mate can feel it too. “Not quite,” Will rejoins wryly, arching back against him once more to prove his point.

Hannibal corrects this egregious oversight promptly, slipping a hand between them to align himself with Will’s leaking hole and pressing in steadily. The both of them let out a pleased sigh when Hannibal is sheathed entirely, his hips flush to Will’s rear. It’s odd, the sense of completeness that comes to Will with this joining now; somehow he knows that Hannibal feels it as well.

They rock together, languid and unrushed, as Hannibal mouths wet kisses across Will’s neck. He always seems to find his way back to the mark that claims Will as his, sucking greedily on the still tender flesh to pull low moans from Will’s throat.

“My love,” he murmurs into Will’s curls, his hand snaking down Will’s torso to wrap around his leaking cock. “I will give you this world and everything in it. I will hunt for you--*with* you--and provide for you always. I will show you Italy and France, Spain, Romania, anywhere else you wish to journey. I will love you and protect you until my dying breath. And if, someday, if you do decide that you wish for a child, I shall give you that as well.”

Will moans at the declarations, at Hannibal’s knot pushing inside him to lock them together, at the steady, rhythmic working of his own aching cock. The feeling of his mate spilling inside him sends him over the edge, and Will gives a weak cry as his own release surges forth, mostly caught by his mate’s hand and promptly consumed by the Alpha behind him.

When his thundering heartbeat has slowed marginally, when he feels as though he can open his mouth and issue forth words rather than just helpless whines, Will lets out a soft chuckle. “Such declarations. Is there anything you won’t do with me, Hannibal Lecter?”

His mate gives a low hum. The arms that Hannibal has wrapped around him tighten just so, his mouth returning to nuzzle against the mark that seals their fates together.

“Let you go,” he answers after a moment of contemplative silence.

And that suits Will Graham just fine.

Chapter End Notes

And that, as they say, is that. I already have several seedlings floating around in my brain for one-offs in this universe for scenes we may have missed in the six week jump or glimpses into the future. I do need to take a slight pause to get back to some video games that have been half-finished in my queue for months so don't expect something in the next week or anything, but sometime. I loved writing stupidly romantic and fluffy Hannibal as well as Dark Will so I do want to delve more into these iterations of them.

Thank you all, darlings, for your time and devotion to this fic. If you've been holding out on your kudos I do hope you will grant them now. ;)

<3

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